

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE  
(POST PROFESSIONAL)

**COMMITTEE CHAIR: DR. WES JANZ**

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**ARCHITECTS FOR EMPOWERMENT: UNDERSTANDING, EXPLORING AND  
RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE IMPOVERISHED IN PUNE, INDIA**

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DECEMBER 2009

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"We have little reason to be concerned about forgotten lives; no interest in using the spaces in the city that have been long abandoned, and no reason to repurpose building elements or materials that can be found among the broken down architectures of our cities. We often don't recognize poor people when we see them and we can usually live lives separate from theirs if we want to; we have plenty of space in this country, and we are confident that more new materials are always at the ready. For the sake of many persons, in many places, this can no longer be the case. Millions of people in the U.S. and approximately one billion people worldwide live in desperate conditions, have little or no money, and if they do build, they do so with whatever they can find. That our profession and professional schools have long denied or ignored the distress of these lives is a tragedy; that we are coming to our senses is among the most exciting of transformations. This is a building epidemic, a tipping point in which we must become even more engaged."

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**Wes Janz**

(Compared to What? Feb, 2007, Archinect)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I owe my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor Dr. Wes Janz whose encouragement, guidance and support from the initial to the final level enabled me to develop an understanding of the subject. I am grateful to my committee members Dr.Nihal Perera and Prof. Olon Dotson because without their support and guidance this thesis would not have been possible.

Also I would like to thank the residents of Kamgar Putala, Pune for offering me their insights and thoughts.

I am indebted to Hector LaSala, Pratima Joshi, and Robert Neuwirth for thought provoking conversations and guidance.

A special thanks to Mrs. Shanta Pawar, our house-worker for allowing me to understand the life of an immigrant.

Lastly, I offer my regards to all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of the project.

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## Abstract

As developing India faces rapid urbanization, the provision of sufficient infrastructure facilities to the informal settlers remains a major challenge. Pune is a second tier city in the state of Maharashtra which is transforming itself into a metropolitan city. The research is an attempt to better understand the existence of slums, explore and suggest empowerment opportunities to improve the living conditions of an informal settlement dweller.

It questions the scope and limitations of the architectural profession specific to the responsibilities of architects towards the impoverished people within the society. This study argues and advocates the need to understand and respond accordingly to the needs of the people who lack access to resources. As an attempt to better understand this perspective, the study takes a closer look at the works and philosophies of Dr. Wes Janz, Dr. Nihal Perera, Prof. Hector LaSala, Lebbeus Woods, Ar. Pratima Joshi, Prof. Nabeel Hamdi, and Robert Neuwirth. Also the research explains the efforts of several non profit organizations like School on Wheels (Indianapolis), Second Helpings (Indianapolis), Hamara Footpath (Mumbai, India), and MicroPlace which work towards providing better living conditions to disadvantaged people.

The study concludes with a proposal for a Non Governmental Organization in Pune, India that will provide the slum dwellers access to education, the internet, and monetary resources which will lead towards their enablement.

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The project is a compilation of attempts made by socially responsible individuals in the academic and professional world. Each of these activists has made unique contributions, since each has his or her own sets of ideas that have the capacity to bring about a change in the world in which we live today. An assortment of such varied ideas will help interested individuals who want to work towards the betterment of the society but are not sure about the direction to follow. All the attempts mentioned in the thesis if adopted at a global level can lead towards creation of a better society.

The agents of change are from the academic and professional fields who are working to bring about a positive change in the lives of the people who are not fortunate enough to have access to resources. The academicians are Wes Janz, Nihal Perera, Hector LaSala, Robert Neuwirth, and Lebbeus Woods. The practitioners include Nabeel Hamdi and Pratima Joshi. Their works are interdisciplinary (and cross the borders of the professional and academic world) hence this classification is only for the sake of convenience. Also the case studies include non profit organizations – Second Helpings (Indianapolis), School on Wheels (Indianapolis), Hamara Footpath (Mumbai, India) and MicroPlace which work towards improving the lives of the less privileged.

Finally, I propose a plan to set up a Non Governmental Organization in Pune, India that will inspire students and professionals to understand and help their local communities.

## Introduction

“Estimates are that there are about a billion squatters in the world today – one of every six humans on the planet. And the density is on the rise. Everyday, close to two hundred thousand people leave their ancestral homes in the rural regions and move to the cities. Almost a million and a half people a week, seventy million a year.”<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations Population Fund states that between 2000 and 2030, Asia's urban population will increase from 1.36 billion to 2.64 billion and developing countries will have 80 per cent of the world's urban population in 2030.<sup>2</sup> One can see the ramifications of this urban population shift in Pune, my hometown. Pune (India) is a second tier city that is facing accelerated urbanization which is having detrimental impacts on the lives of the majority of the residents. According to the National Census the population of the Pune Urban Agglomeration in 2001 was 3.5 million and it was predicted to reach nearly 6 million by 2021. The city of Pune has 2.5 million people living in slums or about 40% of the population.<sup>3</sup> In spite of this, the authorities lack sufficient will and knowledge to improve the existing infrastructure within the city.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World*, (New York, London: Routledge, 2005), 9.

<sup>2</sup>United Nations Population Fund, “The Promise of Urban Growth,” in *State of World Population 2007* (UNFPA, 2007), 7.

<sup>3</sup>Srinanda Sen and Jane Hobs, “The Pune Slum Census: Creating a Socio-Economic and Spatial Information base on a GIS for integrated and inclusive city development,” *Habitat International*, Volume 27, Number 4, (2003): 595-611.

Being an architect (and planner) from Pune, I am concerned about the impact of urbanization on the slums in the second tier cities in developing countries. Through my study I will explore the attempts being made around the world by socially responsible individuals to improve the lives of the urban poor. I will suggest that if the working poor in the city are provided with access to resources like education and food, then informal settlements will evolve as an integral part of the rest of the community.

Finally, I will propose a Non Governmental Organization that will empower the working poor in Pune.

**\*\***In support of my intention to propose an NGO in Pune to be called '*Architects for Empowerment*,' I will mention in this thesis, from time to time, related ideas, inspirations, connections to the proposal to be set out in Chapter titled 'Proposal for an NGO.' Double asterisks will be used to indicate such 'light bulbs.'

## A Paradigm Shift

"I'm less and less interested in affecting someone else's life, in being an agent of change. More and more, I'm interested in being changed and in preparing myself to be an effective respondent."<sup>4</sup>

In Fall 2007 I enrolled in a graduate studio at Ball State University that was geared towards understanding the squatter settlements in different countries. In order to better understand the impoverished people around the world the studio's professor, Dr. Wes Janz, assigned readings by writers around the world, including the first chapter from the book *The Culture of Building*. The author Howard Davis defines a culture of building as "a coordinated system of knowledge, rules, procedures, and habits that surrounds a building process in a given place and time."<sup>5</sup> Among Davis's case studies is an informal settlement in Pune, India, a place I had never visited even though I was a resident of the town for almost 10 years. During our conversations Dr. Janz asked me if I had ever seen this place within my hometown and I was embarrassed to confess that I had never even thought about visiting this place. I have to admit that even though I strongly believe that architects should be socially responsible I myself never understood the real meaning of being socially responsible. It was then that I realized how ignorant I had been about my own hometown. The studio offered me a valuable insight which was more like a paradigm shift as far as my perceptions about the poor in my country; the poor are not

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<sup>4</sup>Wes Janz, *One Small Project Interview* by Bryan Finoki, March 2006, Subtopia - <http://subtopia.blogspot.com/2006/03/wes-janz-interview.html> (accessed August 15, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Howard Davis, *The Culture of Building* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 5.

someone to be ignored, but must be understood more clearly so that the society no longer misunderstands and avoids their participation in the community. During this whole studio experience I realized that the change in attitude towards disadvantaged people must begin with me. Unfortunately most of the middle and upper class society never cares to know about the lives of the people working in their own houses. I was not aware of the last name of the maid in our house, a woman who has worked for our family for 5 years. The upper and middle classes ignore and isolate the poor. Why is it that the poor are primarily perceived as people who can commit crime? During my visit to India in May 2008, I visited an informal settlement in Pune where I talked to slum dwellers for the first time. These individuals were friendly, approachable and humane. Now I believe that not every poor person is a criminal and so my feeling of insecurity decreased as the amount of interaction increased. This psychological aspect of human behavior has to be understood so that the isolation of poor can be reduced.

However, besides the lack of awareness amongst the middle and upper class, I feel that the reasons for these disconnections lie somewhere in our training and education. We are trained to be an architect and not educated to be a responsible human being who has certain responsibilities towards the society of which he or she is undeniably a part. So in my thesis I have studied the role of responsible individuals in the academic and professional field. The academicians include Wes Janz, Nihal Perera, Hector LaSala, and Lebbeus Woods, people who teach to create a sense of social responsibility amongst their students. The professionals are Nabeel Hamdi and Pratima Joshi who work towards improving the lives of the poor through creation of a sense of self awareness and enablement amongst the impoverished. In addition I have researched the not-for-profit entities Hamara Footpath, School on Wheels, Microplace, and Second



Helpings, organizations whose mission is to mitigate some of the problems associated with poverty.

Such a critical understanding will help interested students to develop a humane approach that promotes acceptance of the poor people. The slum dwellers should not be forced or expected to live in isolation but should be an integral part of the society. What any slum dweller needs is empowerment which can enable him or her to advocate for his or her rights.

“While the United States has enjoyed unprecedented affluence, low wage employees have been testing the American doctrine that hard work cures poverty.”<sup>6</sup>

As an international student and also as an outsider, I always believed that poverty did not exist in America. I strongly believed in this perception until I was awakened by a reading during a Fall 2007 graduate studio. The studio content was established by Dr. Janz and was intended to create a certain level of awareness among the students about the informal settlements around the world. However the reality was that the students, who were ready to venture into the outer world, were absolutely unaware about the situation of the poor in the outer world. The studio encouraged the students to explore the opportunities available to improve and also learn from the people who do not have access to the basic necessities. At this point it is very necessary to define the concept of slums. For the scope of this thesis, a slum is defined as an illegal squatter or informal settlement that lacks basic infrastructure facilities. These dwellings include a wide variety of permanent or temporary structures which have limited or no access to electricity, water, or sanitation.

During my reading of the book *The Working Poor* I came to realize that poverty exists in the U.S., and that even though the country is set up on a strong belief that everyone who works hard can improve his or her economic status, it does not hold true in the great

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<sup>6</sup>David K. Shipler, *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 5.

majority of situations. The author states: "Their wages do not lift them far enough from poverty to improve their lives, and their lives, in turn hold them back. The term by which they are usually described, 'working poor' should be an oxymoron. Nobody who works hard should be poor in America."<sup>7</sup>

In the United States, the Census Bureau measures poverty based on economic thresholds whereas in India it is measured in terms of per capita calorie intake. The standard of living of the poor people in India is comparatively lower than most working poor in America. However even if this economic disparity exists there are similar trends amongst the poor in a developing and developed nation around the world. A key difference lies in the definition of poverty or rather the measurement of poverty in economic and financial terms. "Most impoverished people in the world," states Shipler, "would be dazzled by the apartments, telephones, television sets, running water, clothing, and other amenities that surround the poor in America. But that does not mean that the poor are not poor, or that those on the edge of poverty are not truly on the edge of a cliff."<sup>8</sup> So even though America is supposed to be a land of equal opportunities where anyone who works hard can climb up the economic ladder, it is not completely true. In this, an economy that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer is still difficult to grasp.

This finding is very similar to the situation in a developing country like India. The working poor in America and India are always exploited by the economy, and then denied the basic benefits like healthcare and education. The fact that being poor means being

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<sup>7</sup>David K. Shipler, *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 5.

<sup>8</sup>David K. Shipler, *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 8.

unprotected holds true in developed as well as developing countries. The working people are the ones who help to strengthen the economy by putting their hard work and ultimately their entire lives into building a community. The poor in India exist as cheap and readily available labor. They set up local businesses and work on the construction sites. Similarly, the poorer people in America work at Wal-Mart, serve food at McDonald's, help clean and maintain the spaces, all at a very low wage.

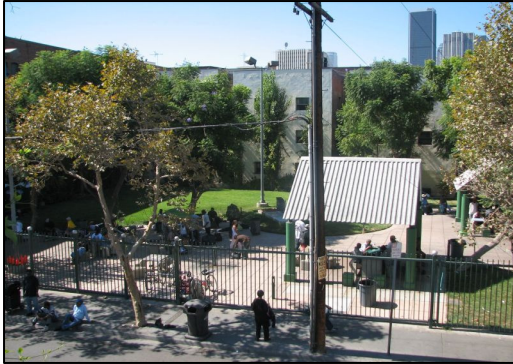
About 37% of the urban work force of the developing world is in the informal sector. More than 90% of additional jobs in urban areas in the next decade will be created in micro and small scale enterprises in the informal sector.<sup>9</sup> The immigrants in India leave their rural towns to come to the major cities in search of better opportunities, only to remain as 'working poor.' In such a situation, how long can we afford to deny their existence?

During the studio my entire perspective about the poor changed due to the realization that an educated person like me is simply ignorant about the realities of the poor.

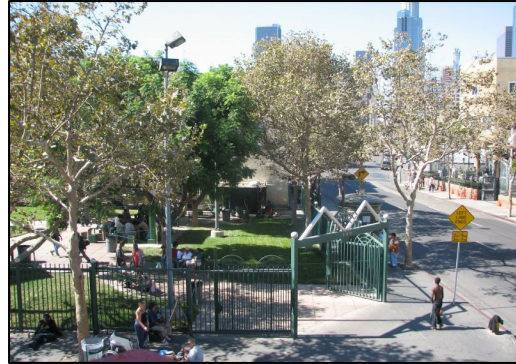
Another revelation was experienced during our visit to Skid Row in Los Angeles as a part of the same graduate studio. Skid Row is a community of poor people which is located near downtown Los Angeles. Architect Michael Lehrer gave us a walking tour of the district. While this was an opportunity to interact with the poor within the community, I realized that a 'fear factor,' or a feeling that these people are strangers, still existed within me. The poor called the streets and the parks their homes.

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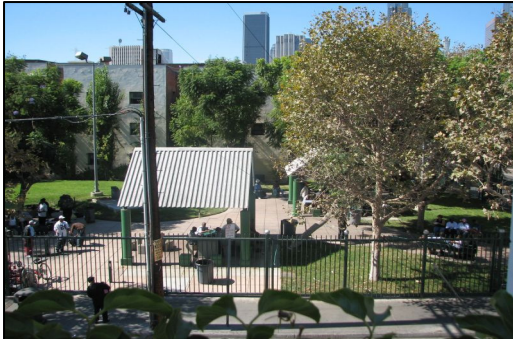
<sup>9</sup>United Nations Human Settlements Programme, "Assessing slums in the development context," in *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London & Sterling: Earth Scan, 2003), 61.



**Figure 1. Skid Row, Los Angeles**  
 October 2007  
 All photographs by the author, unless otherwise noted.  
 The place was alive and vibrant since the people were using the place as per their own needs.



**Figure 2. Skid Row, Los Angeles**  
 October 2007  
 The park was a place of interaction amongst the inhabitants.



**Figure 3. Skid Row, Los Angeles**  
 October 2007



**Figure 4. Skid Row, Los Angeles**  
 October 2007

Later in May 2008, I visited a squatter settlement in Pune, India which had adapted itself to the available spaces as per the peoples' needs.



**Figure 5. Pune Informal Settlement**  
May 2008

The women were using places for interaction besides just using them for regular chores. This pattern existed throughout which made the places multi-functional.



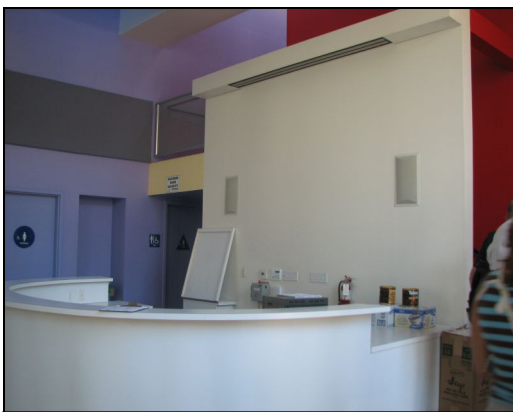
**Figure 6. Pune Informal Settlement**  
May 2008

The multi-functional spaces help to create a social connection amongst the dwellers.

I was able to interact with the local people and got to know more about their lives and their difficulties. However during the visit to Skid Row I felt that it was unsafe to talk with strangers. Since most middle or upper class people are scared to talk to the slum dwellers this 'us and them' distinction exists. So does this 'us' and 'them' feeling exist only because we are not comfortable interacting with them? This is a question that each individual needs to ask himself. Is it also because we are unable to accept the poor as humans who are unfortunate and who lack nothing else but opportunities? Can we really help the unfortunate people to get close to the opportunities like education and infrastructure facilities? Each responsible architect, planner has to self introspect to find an answer that he or she can justify.

Lehrer designed the Drop In Center and also the James Wood Community Center for the transient population (people from near by areas who come to Los Angeles to find labor jobs) in the area. The Center provides sleeping and bathing facilities where the

poor reserve a bed in advance if they wish to stay overnight. The visitors have their own unique way of adapting and using the places which were designed by the architect. For example the front court was being used for relaxation and reading activity. Lehrer described each of these award winning designs. Still understanding how local residents relate to these designed spaces remains a challenge. Architects still isolate themselves when designing spaces for poor people by believing in their own perceptions about the poor and ignoring their (poor peoples') understanding about a place. Each architect still is deeply tied to the shackles of knowledge that keep him or her tied to learned principles and pedagogies. Can we actually go beyond the knowledge barriers that our profession has set and understand the needs of the poor?



**Figure 7. Skid Row, Los Angeles,**  
October 2007



**Figure 8. Skid Row, Los Angeles,**  
October 2007

Another experience that acted as a paradigm shift was the visit to the Homeless Health Care Needle Exchange Center in Los Angeles. Mark Casanova, the director of the center, is deeply concerned for the addicted poor within the community. Casanova and his team strive towards improving the health of the homeless poor by educating, serving and advocating for them. The stark difference between a common person like me, who absolutely ignores the problems of the poor as their own, and Mr. Casanova, who solves

those as his own was obvious. In this instance, the 'us' and 'them' barrier vanished. Mr. Casanova and with his team are a part of the community. There is a need for more people like Mark Casanova who can follow the 'bottom up' approach which is about understanding the needs of the local people. He believes, "Eliminating homelessness in Los Angeles will not come soon, that is a near certainty. We can, however, provide the homeless population with a modest amount of health services, education, and a political voice in the meantime."<sup>10</sup>

There is a need to understand and consider poor people as citizens who have the right to live respectable lives. The problem that is most common within a community is the lack of acceptance towards the poor who therefore remain socially isolated. Casanova and his staff believe that educating the poor about the problems related to drug consumption and then also helping the addicts overcome the addiction is the most appropriate way to serve their society. Besides this, the organization fights for the rights of the poor and provides training in health and safety that can prevent further damage. So creating a sense of awareness amongst the poor is a way of enabling the impoverished, who can then understand the problems of other people within the community and help them address addiction.

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<sup>10</sup>Homeless Health Care, Los Angeles, <http://www.hhcla.org/about.htm> (accessed August 2009).



“The link between slums, poverty and social stigmas was firmly established in the popular imagination and common vocabulary.”<sup>11</sup>

“As the nations developed the lack of provision of basic infrastructure facilities led to the evolution of slums. Today’s slums reveal the spatial dimension of contemporary urban stratification. This trend has been accentuated by advances in modern information and communication technologies that enable affluent households to isolate themselves from ‘less desirable’ parts of the city.”<sup>12</sup>

As urbanization increases, the proportion of slums increases simultaneously. A poor immigrant’s initial attempt to settle into a city is often a slum. In essence the city authorities ignore any informal settler as they inhabit a less noticed and less needed piece of land. Later on, when land costs rise, these settlements become eyesores that need to be quickly fixed. Crime, poverty, and lack of sanitation facilities define slums as areas of neglect for the educated middle and upper class, who then push the dwellers into years of social exile. But the truth is that slums are not static; they are constantly evolving, changing and developing. The immigrants upgrade their houses and living styles as they acquire more stability.

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<sup>11</sup>United Nations Human Settlements Programme, “Assessing slums in the development context,” in *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London & Sterling: Earth Scan, 2003), 64.

<sup>12</sup>United Nations Human Settlements Programme, “Assessing slums in the development context,” in *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London & Sterling: Earth Scan, 2003), 63.



**Figure 10. Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

The structures are built of discarded materials that the people collect from the local construction sites. They often have small carts outside their houses which can be used for business purpose.



**Figure 11. Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

The buildings are comprised of permanent and semi-permanent structures depending on the economic situation of the owner. This place is being used for storage and a local grocery store.

The upper and middle classes pay little attention because a worker can be easily replaced. Slum dwellers typically face social isolation since the society (middle and upper class) thinks about any poor community as breeding grounds for crime and other illegal activities. However the truth remains that the educated class exploits a worker's labor by absolutely denying and ignoring his or her share in life. I realized this when I was asked about the name of the maid who has been serving in our house for quite a while now. I did not know her name. I am one of the people who thought that the poor are simply here to serve the people who can afford to pay. Why do educated people like me take a poor person for granted and do not give him or her the due credit for the efforts that he or she puts into our lives?

Dharavi is an informal settlement in Mumbai, India and is known as the largest slum in Asia with a population estimated at over one-half million residents. In her book

*Rediscovering Dharavi*, the author Kalpana Sharma traces the origin of the informal settlement, and studies daily lives and needs of the dwellers. In her book's preface, the author mentions the optimistic approaches and resilience of the residents. This book provides information to Indians like me who do not perceive Dharavi as a place full of activity and vibrant lifestyles. The attempt to capture the life in the community is something unique and very creditable on the author's side.



**Figure 12. Dharavi, Mumbai 2008** Photographs by Wes Janz

As a person unaware of Dharavi's fullness and complexity, it was interesting to know that it is made up of villages and townships from all over India. As you come to know more about each individual's life the reader starts to understand that each person has different reasons for inhabiting the place. These reasons make Dharavi a unique fabric woven from each person's different qualities and perceptions. It feels like this is a homogenous assortment of diverse lifestyles.

During the Cap Asia V field study program to South Asia in 2008, the program director Dr. Nihal Perera, and co-director Wes Janz, planned to take their students to Dharavi. Before the visit I informed Dr. Janz that this was a place where I would be scared to go in spite of being from the same country. I realized that my mind was occupied by the preconceived notions that Dharavi is unsafe and full of criminal activities. After knowing more about the place the 'fear factor' about the people disappeared. There is a need to create awareness that Dharavi is not a place of crime and poverty only but a vibrant and active community. Sharma states that,

“Governments first ignore the existence of slums and try and get rid of them through demolitions. When this does not succeed, and slums emerge as settled areas through the efforts of their illegal occupants, they are recognized. After this, selectively some services are offered, such as water and sanitation and redevelopment. But slum dwellers are never allowed to forget that they have no legal status.”<sup>13</sup>

The approaches of the government are so typical and ignorant about the 'context' that they create a more diverse set of associated problems instead of providing the people with the basic infrastructure facilities. The author also mentions a universal truth:

“The consequence of such an ad hoc and short sighted approach towards the housing needs of the urban poor is evident in every Indian society where, roughly between half and three quarters of the population lives in slums or substandard houses.”<sup>14</sup>

Can architects and planners, first make an attempt to understand slums through surveys, and then help design appropriate policies for upgradation?

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<sup>13</sup>Kalpana Sharma, *Rediscovering Dharavi: Stories from Asia's Largest Slums* (India: Penguin, 2000), 17.

<sup>14</sup>Kalpana Sharma, *Rediscovering Dharavi: Stories from Asia's Largest Slum* (India: Penguin, 2000), 17.

## Do we really know Slums?

“International migration is a global extension of the bright lights urbanization phenomenon, where migrants are seeking economic opportunity in the expanding economies.”<sup>15</sup>

As we are fortunate to have access to better living conditions and possess social status, can we also acknowledge that slums exist mainly because a government is unable to provide the necessary infrastructure facilities? As professionals typically ignore the slums as areas not worth their consideration, most of the positive elements within the slum fabric are overlooked. Here are a few striking points that cannot be ignored:

1. The design of houses is based on minimalistic requirements where each area functions for varied uses. Space is constrained, as a result it must be used efficiently.
2. Slums follow a pattern language in which the ground coverage is more and the area for each space is minimal which can be used as an alternative to the building techniques of high rise structures.
3. Slums transform neglected or unwanted pieces of land into lively, habitable places. The settlements grow along the river banks often in annual flood plains, or along the bridge, or along slopes of a hillside. These neglected

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<sup>15</sup> Akhtar Chauhan, “Learning from Slums” in *Minimal Space, Minimal Housing* by Peter Schreibmayer and Johann Grabner (Austria: Technische Universitaet Graz 1996), 32.

parts of land are transformed into habitable, humane places which make optimal use of space and resources.

4. Initially the basic services such as water supply, drainage do not exist. However the residents adopt incremental infrastructure development tactics which are a key to their growth.
5. The creative use of recycled materials is certainly an asset, even as it improves the existing environments.
6. Slums are vibrant, living, sustainable communities in which residents are socially, and hence spiritually, connected to their spaces.



**Figure 13. Informal Settlement, Pune**

May 2008

The building vocabulary is comprised of locally available materials which are recycled over and over.

And, the inhabitants have a well knit social and economic network which keeps them together and helps them flourish through co-operation and self help. Akhtar Chauhan, in *Minimal Space, Minimal Housing*, describe these qualities of slums as:

“Slums are not built as a result of ego-centric gesture of an individual or a corporation. Slums are the constructive results of collective efforts of a group or community. Development and maintenance of slums

calls for on-going collective organization of land development, shelter-making, obtaining basic services and ensuring social security. It is a positive expression of people's participation in development process."<sup>16</sup>

After the insight during my studio I decided to use my trip to India in May 2008 as an opportunity to interact with my housemaid who has been working at our place for the last 5 years. It was after this interaction that I realized how important these immigrants are to the entire community. Shanta Pawar immigrated to Pune from a neighboring village along with her entire family about 6 years ago. She stays as a caretaker in a bungalow within our housing society which is located in Vakil Nagar, Pune. Her family consists of her husband and two children and her in-laws who are also involved in the local economy through their activities. Her husband is a rickshaw driver; her father-in-law is a vegetable vendor, and her mother-in-law is also a housemaid working in the surrounding community. Sometimes her father-in-law cannot make it to each house with his vegetable cart so in that instance his customers just stop by his house to buy vegetables. This is an ideal example of how a family becomes a part of the local economy; now they are an inseparable part of the local economic culture. They also serve as caretakers for a bungalow within our community that is not currently occupied by the owner. They stay in the porch and open space around the bungalow and have created their own temporary structure. The images below show the way they are using the different available open areas for varied functions.

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<sup>16</sup> Akhtar Chauhan, "Learning from Slums", in *Minimal Space, Minimal Housing* by Peter Schreibmayer and Johann Grabner (Austria: Technische Universitaet Graz 1996), 32.





**Figure 14. Informal Dwelling, Pune**  
May 2008

The front porch is being used as living area, rest area, and also for storage of a vegetable cart.



**Figure 15. Informal Dwelling, Pune**  
May 2008

The structure is built of recycled materials: tarpaulin, aluminum, and wood posts. The shanty structure acts as a cooking area for the family.

Obviously these resourceful individuals have systematically analyzed each open space and used it for appropriate functions as per their priorities. The front porch is being used as a living area where they can meet and take rest. The temporary structure is being used as a cooking area. This family is an inseparable part of the community and yet they are neglected because they can be easily replaced.



**Figure 16. Informal Dwelling, Pune**  
May 2008



**Figure 17. Informal Dwelling, Pune**  
May 2008





**Figure 18. Informal Dwelling, Pune**  
May 2008

These pictures show the interior view of the structure shown on the previous page. This is the cooking area for Shanta. The minimalistic living style is evident where every commodity is used to its greatest extent.

The slum inhabitants' approach to community development helps us understand the need for micro-planning in order to make efficient and optimum use of natural resources. During an independent study that I took with Dr. Janz in Spring 2008 I was assigned a reading titled 'gecekondur' by Mary Ann Ray which described the local building process in Istanbul, Turkey. I was awakened by the tremendous positive energy and thought that surrounds the existence of a gecekondu (Translation: 'Overnight Apartment'). The article states that houses built in one night gain legitimate status as per Turkish law. These vernacular builders have a lot to offer to the architects and builders in terms of how quickly and efficiently a house can be built. In countries like India the main problem still persists – how to confer upon these illegitimate settlements a legal status? Can the poor communities be recognized as a legitimate zone in future comprehensive plans? The

situation is an irony in itself because even though we know that the rate of urbanization is increasing and an increasing number of people stay in slums (I would prefer to call them impoverished settlements) and even though they form a backbone for the economy, still the government does not even think about offering them a legal status. I realized that the term 'slum' brings along with it a lot of prejudices. Can we articulate a vocabulary / language that does not have biased opinions about an informal settlement and its residents?

Ray provides a few insights, including "gecekondu were built of substantial, mostly legitimate and even standard materials, and that they took their weight more strongly and directly to the ground."<sup>17</sup> So what implications can we derive from such observations? The obvious thought was: so far not a lot of architects in Pune have actually made an attempt to understand and build on these existing building cultures. The author states that after her group's visit to gecekondu she redefined her interpretation about what architecture means:

"We saw an architecture that had not been called architecture before, an architecture that was quick and nimble on its roaming feet. As it turned out, it was architecture that the thing we had always called architecture before had a lot to learn from. In no particular order, our architecture began to learn from this architecture."<sup>18</sup>

So can every building built by poor be counted as a piece of architecture? Probably we as architects have preconceived notions about architecture being an elaborate

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<sup>17</sup>Mary Ann Ray, "Gecekondu," in *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 153.

<sup>18</sup>Mary Ann Ray, "Gecekondu," in *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 153.

masterpiece; hence we do not pay enough attention to the architecture of these vernacular builders. The architectural elements used in the gecekondü building process (gable infills made of flattened collected food tins, for example) are sustainable and vernacular which means we can learn a lot from these local craftsmen. The analogy of 'building is a verb' is universally applicable because in each informal settlement, the builder is the inhabitant and the inhabitant the builder. Ray states that in this case there exists no separation between the maker and the making. Doesn't this clearly mean that we as architects could follow the local inhabitant's knowledge and approach in dealing with such situations? She states that relevant use is made of every material – so we should learn to adapt this approach of being creative and resourceful like these people who make the most out of nothing. These masterminds know the meaning of 'less is more.' However we architects think as 'less being a bore' and look for variety which may not necessarily mean use of local materials (thus further deviating away from sustainable architecture).

The most innovative aspect of the design is that none of the rooms are designed to serve a specific purpose but act as multi purpose space; the furniture is moveable and flexible. The author describes this as "Each space takes on simultaneous roles as rooms to work, play, eat, sleep, bathe or do other things in as times of day, seasons, and sizes and constitutions of the families change."<sup>19</sup> So there is a lot to learn about design sustainability and modular space from vernacular builders. However, we never perceive them as trained designers but only as 'eye sores' and unwanted habitations. There are amazing (and most of the times neglected) insights

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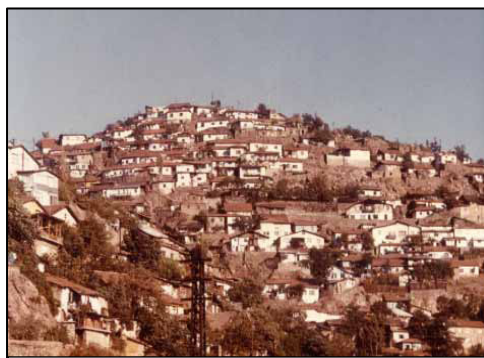
<sup>19</sup>Mary Ann Ray, "Gecekondü," in *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 153.

about the proactive thinking (planning) that is involved before the actual designing and implementation process. The use of salvaged materials shows how much these individuals value recycling. The carpets slide from floors up onto sofas and from sofas up onto walls. The most striking feature is that the houses are built after taking advantage of whatever has been laid before. The people really have a lot to teach designers and we should take a back seat and leave our prejudices apart for a while so that we can listen to these silent inventors.



**Figure 19. Gecekonu, Turkey**

Photograph by Saracgil, Ayse, 1999, Source - Archnet



**Figure 20. Gecekonu, Turkey**

Photograph by Saracgil, Ayse, 1999, Source - Archnet

## Existence of Pune Slums

The National Commission on Urbanization (headed by architect Charles Correa) estimated that in 1981, out of the total urban population of 160 million in India, 32 to 40 million people (or 6 to 8 million households) were living in slums. It was projected that by 2001, there would be 60 to 75 million people living in slums in India. After this projection was made the actual slum population rose to 30 to 50% in different large cities and metropolitan agglomerations.<sup>20</sup> Below are a few facts about Pune, a city experiencing tremendous urban expansion:

Forty per cent of Pune's population lives in slums. The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) estimates some 88,000 people migrated to the city in 2006, of which 45,000 settled in the slums.<sup>21</sup>

A large number of slum dwellers, about 40%, live on land which is defined as marginal or 'unbuildable,' that is land along hill slopes, river sides, and depressions and along railway tracks. These are statistics, which are continuously being quoted by the Pune Municipal Corporation.<sup>22</sup>

About 5% of the city's 'buildable' land is used by the remaining 60% of the slum dwellers. If we now say that there are more than a million slum dwellers in Pune, then we can estimate that half the city's population live on just

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<sup>20</sup>The Punekar, "Pune Growing into a City of Slums," <http://punekar.in/site/2007/12/18/pune-growing-into-city-of-slums/> (Accessed August 2009).

<sup>21</sup>The Punekar, "Pune Growing into a City of Slums," <http://punekar.in/site/2007/12/18/pune-growing-into-city-of-slums/> (Accessed August 2009).

<sup>22</sup>Srinanda Sen and Jane Hobs, "The Pune Slum Census: Creating a Socio-Economic and Spatial Information base on a GIS for integrated and inclusive city development," Habitat International, Volume 27, Number 4, (2003): 595-611.

10% of the city's land, and therefore, only 5% of the city's 'buildable land' is occupied by them.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 21. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

The settlement suffered due to the flooding in 1997 which created the need for rehabilitation by the people.



**Figure 22. Kumar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

The settlement is located near a railway bridge along the slopes of Mula River, Pune.

The city is transitioning from a second tier city to a metropolitan city and hence creating tremendous economic opportunities. The people from the nearby villages migrate to the city in search of better living conditions and work. The city provides employment of some form; yet the authorities, the state, and the market fail to provide the new immigrants with the basic infrastructure and living facilities. As an initial attempt to blend into the local environment the immigrants build temporary structures on inhabitable pieces of land which they later transform into permanent or semi permanent structures.

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<sup>23</sup>Srinanda Sen and Jane Hobs, "The Pune Slum Census: Creating a Socio-Economic and Spatial Information base on a GIS for integrated and inclusive city development," Habitat International, Volume 27, Number 4, (2003), 595-611.



**Figure 23. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune May 2008**

The dwellers are in the process of relocation to Hadapsar, a suburb of Pune. But some people are not willing to relocate due to their economic and social ties to this place.



**Figure 24. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune May 2008**

During my India visit in May 2008, I was able to visit an informal settlement near Kamgar Putala, Pune that lacks the basic facilities like water, sanitation and electricity. In spite of this situation the people are in high spirits and their positive approach and fighting spirit keeps them going. Each of the persons residing here has his or her own reason for migration. Every person has sought innovative ways to blend into the local economy. These hard workers have become so much a part of the middle class people's lives that if they do not exist life would be different for the rest of the society. The life of middle and upper class society would be inconvenient if there are no local businesses like tea stalls and telephone booths, which are an essential element of their daily lives. If the immigrants do not offer their labor for household work the life of a working woman would be negatively affected. Every person staying at Kamgar Putala has his or her own contribution towards the local economy.





**Figure 25. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune May 2008**

Sangam Bridge, Pune along which the settlements have developed.



**Figure 26. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune May 2008**

The footpath faces a major road where the local businesses are set up. The location improves the business prospects.

The poor adjust themselves to the available space that is then customized to suit their own needs. Each space within the community is being used for different purposes which can be seen in the images below.



**Figure 27. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune May 2008**

Women meet in common areas everyday. In doing so, they build a well knit social network.



**Figure 28. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune May 2008**

The footpath serves varied functions; one of them is drying clothes.





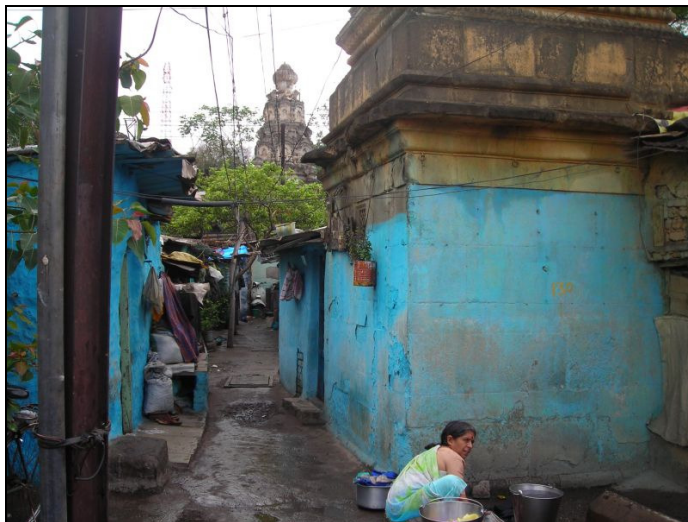
**Figure 29. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

Common areas serve as areas of interaction.



**Figure 30. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

Recycled materials are used for building semi permanent structures.



**Figure 31. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

The narrow lanes and footpaths are used for varied purposes; one of them being shared wash area. A temple can be seen in the background.



**Figure 32. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

The footpaths are an integral part of the settlement, in this case serving as storage areas for carts.



**Figure 33. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

A local business telephone is available for use within the community.



**Figure 34. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune**  
May 2008

Children enjoy their share of life in the open verandas outside the houses.



**Figure 35. Kamgar Putala Informal Settlement, Pune May 2008**

The visit gave me an opportunity to interact and understand some of the problems of these hard working individuals. After the flooding of the Mula Mutha River in 1997, the residents were relocated to a settlement built in a suburb called Hadapsar. However their problems did not end here, since if they leave their homes they will lose their current local jobs. So how can they adapt themselves to a place where they are not sure about their job prospects? The authorities have not asked them about such issues. The decisions were taken by the authorities along with an NGO. However the peoples' concerns went unnoticed. So practically the people still do not have the right to voice opinion even if it is related to own interests. After talking with the local residents, I realized that each of them was hopeful that after listening to their problems I would definitely help them solve those problems. The only question that came to my mind was, can I provide the people a platform to express concerns and problems?

The program of Architecture studies in India is set to ignore the realities of poor people. The young architects lack awareness about the outside real world situation. Surprisingly, in a developing country like India where one cannot ignore the fact that the number of slums is on the rise, there are no proactive curricular efforts to tackle the situation. The curriculum is based on theoretical knowledge that hardly stands the 'real world' test. The five years simply enforce in each student a feeling that the profession is only meant for elite individuals. So is architecture really only for the high end of the society? Or might it be for the immigrants who constitute a major proportion of the developing world? Understanding the gravity of the problem can we simply afford to say we do not care?

The coursework in India is based on tendencies in western design education in which history, construction theory, and professional practice are featured. Unfortunately I am not able to recall a single course that addressed the need to know people who do not have access to resources. So to begin with, there has to be a realization that there is a lack of knowledge and awareness. Architecture is being thought of as a necessity for the elite and not a means to provide infrastructure to those who need it the most or for whom it is a most crucial aspect in their survival. This realization dawned upon me during my studio conversations with Dr. Janz and now I feel the need to understand the attempts being made currently by individuals who believe that we need to understand, learn, and work towards the betterment of the lives of the less fortunate.



During my independent studies I realized that there are various individuals like Nabeel Hamdi, Pratima Joshi, Hector LaSala, Nihal Perera, Wes Janz, Lebbeus Woods and Robert Neuwirth who are working towards improving the lives of the less privileged. All these individuals have something in common besides just the will to empower the poor communities. They all believe in small change as a catalyst to make a huge difference. Each of these people has his or her own approach towards the process of 'community development.' For example, Hamdi states that "we need to redefine design and planning as part of the process of *enablement* and involving users in the process of participatory design"<sup>24</sup> Enablement can be achieved if and only if the planners and architects shed their ignorance about the poor settlements and settlers and understand (rather learn from) them and in the process help them improve their quality of life in terms of accessibility to resources and better living infrastructure facilities. A change in focus in the traditional slum rehabilitation approach can be brought about by a change in the process of community upliftment through 'bottom up' self-organizing collective approach.

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<sup>24</sup>Nabeel Hamdi, *Small Change* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 12.

## Implications of “Development”

The United Nations had mentioned in 2003 that in the next 30 years the number of slum dwellers will increase to about 2 billion on the planet, if no firm and concrete action is taken but it has already exceeded the mark.<sup>25</sup> It is obvious that the developing countries are growing at a tremendous rate. However, while the number of squatter communities keeps increasing, this growth is largely unnoticed. In addition the concept of development does not account for the need to improve lives of the less fortunate. Can development be measured only in terms of economic progress? Amartya Sen, who is an internationally recognized, Nobel Prize-winning economist, defines development as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. “Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states.”<sup>26</sup> Nabeel Hamdi, an architect, professor at Oxford Brookes University, and an experienced community activist states that, “Development happens when people, however poor in money, get together, get organized, become sophisticated and go to scale. It happens when they are savvy and able to influence or change the course of events or the order of things locally, nationally

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<sup>25</sup>United Nations Human Settlements Programme, “Key Findings and Messages,” *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London & Sterling: Earth Scan, 2003), 91.

<sup>26</sup>Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 5.

or even globally – or are themselves able to become that order or part of it.”<sup>27</sup> So the scope of development has to expand to include solutions to deal with the negative consequences like the growing number of squatter communities. Urbanization is one aspect of this development and architects and planners play a major role in this form of development. Architects and planners typically are not aware of this definition of development which leads to ignorance about the real needs of the poor. The realization that the architectural academics and profession are not defined to include the need to deal with the situation of the poor further complicates the situation. Margaret Crawford who is a professor of Architecture at Harvard University states, “The current gap between individual concern and professional inertia represents a contemporary reformulation of a persistent barrier between the needs of professional identity and the demands of social responsibility.”<sup>28</sup> Architects need to see poor people as our future clients who need our services as much as an economically stable individual. And in the words of Crawford, “Identifying these ideal clients is an important first step toward creating a discourse adequate to the enormous tasks faced by the architectural profession if it accepts the challenge of reshaping society and the built environment.”<sup>29</sup> However the problem is not only about the ignorance on the professional’s side but also about the perception of the poor in the current society. The contribution of the poor towards the local economy is still unnoticed by the educated society which heavily relies on their cheap labor services. The majority of the slum dwellers in developing countries earn their living from the informal sector activities located either within or outside slum areas, and many informal entrepreneurs operating from slums have clienteles extending

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<sup>27</sup>Nabeel Hamdi, *Small Change*, (London: Earthscan, 2004), 16.

<sup>28</sup>Margaret Crawford, “Can architects be socially responsible,” in *Out of Site* (Bay Press, 1991), 27.

<sup>29</sup>Margaret Crawford, “Can architects be socially responsible,” in *Out of Site* (Bay Press, 1991), 44.

to the rest of the city.<sup>30</sup> Robert Neuwirth, former community activist in New York City, Squattercity blogger and author of *Shadow Cities*, states,

“The poor are not the ones who disrupt the civil society, rather they follow the rules and laws of the society. If the rich and the well born were treated as badly by governments as squatters have been, there would have been a rebellion long ago. The miracle is that the world’s squatters value civil society and want to find a way of working within the system. They are law-abiding outlaws, patriotic criminals.”<sup>31</sup>

There is a strong sense of ignorance about the slums that needs to be changed. There is still a lack of knowledge about the organization and various skill sets of the poor people in terms of their local businesses, labor services, resource management and building culture that needs to be understood by the common middle class person. There is also a need to educate the larger society about the inherent skills and assets of the poor. An action plan needs to be devised at the professional level starting with a basic change in approach. After understanding the manner in which a poor household manages its resources and harnesses energies, the policies can be devised to address poverty. Collective social action is one of the great assets of the poor community that can be used towards their empowerment. The concept of empowerment and enablement are described by Hamdi based on his own experience in community action planning. When the poor are awakened about their real capacities or assets then the architect or planner acts as a catalyst for bringing about desired change. The question is; are the poor to be blamed for the creation of the slums? The poor migrate to the city in search of basic necessities and opportunities that would help them improve their lives. The immigrants set up their own affordable housing as their first attempt to settle into the

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<sup>30</sup>United Nations Health Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* (London: Earth scan Publications, 2003).

<sup>31</sup>Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 310.



urbanized society. The people get used to the existence of slums within their vicinity and never realize the need to upgrade these eyesores; they develop a tendency to ignore the slum's existence. The squatters exist because they are denied the legitimate right to live within a city. Neuwirth states that,

“They are not seizing an abstract right, they are taking an actual place: a place to lay their heads. This act to challenge the society's denial of place by taking one of your own is an assertion of being in a world that routinely denies people the dignity and validity inherent in a home.”<sup>32</sup>

So the challenge to design inclusive cities that offer the poor legitimate resident status can never be accomplished unless the society is educated about the poor and their lives. Neuwirth states that understanding the squatter heritage means accepting that squatters exist and their constructions are a form of urban development. He states that in order for the poor to progress we need focus groups made up of local people and helped by the community social workers that would fight for their rights and create in them a sense of self awareness. The concept is quite similar to the idea of enablement by Nabeel Hamdi. Slum policies should seek to involve the poor in the formulation, financing, and implementation of slum upgrading programs and projects, building on the logic of the innovative solutions developed by the poor themselves to improve their living conditions.<sup>33</sup> However this does not occur due to the fact that the poor are never completely aware of their rights. While forced eviction and resettlements still occur in India, the government is still reluctant to change its repressive approach. In spite of these depressing conditions, there are innovative solutions developed by people to improve their own living conditions.

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<sup>32</sup>Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 311.

<sup>33</sup>United Nations Health Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* (London: Earth scan Publications, 2003), 27.

Architecture needs to broaden its scope and works towards the betterment of the lives of the poor especially when it comes to understanding the needs of the poor. As always we believe in the myth that the poor are to be ignored and neglected in the entire process of self building. Then how do we understand that we are also individuals who sometimes forget that we are not professionals who completely understand the building technology and accept that local builders are knowledgeable about the building technology as us? How do we redefine the scope of our own field? I studied a set of individuals who have beliefs about the profession, its scope and needs. Each of these individuals has strategies that would make a difference to the existing situation. There is Pratima Joshi who believes that urban planning must consider the option of legalization of the slums. Similarly Hector LaSala believes that networking and understanding the needs of the people can help build resources. Janz, Perera and LaSala believe in training students by broadening the scope of the profession. Hamdi states that,

“The architectural profession is hopelessly out of touch with the realities about the needs of providing shelter, if indeed these realities fit the general schema of architecture as it is currently taught and practiced and currently confined within the art and the politics of the special and the monumental rather than the ordinary.”<sup>34</sup>

Each of the individuals has a unique approach towards uplifting the life of the poor. Each is acting as a catalyst for change. Each believes that small beginnings have emergent

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<sup>34</sup>Nabeel Hamdi, “Deciding on Context,” *Housing without houses: participation, flexibility, enablement* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), 9.

potential. These are individuals who stand for change and who believe that we have the ability and capacity to infuse this change. There is something each and every responsible professional can do to provide better living conditions to those who are in need. During the process of understanding each person's work there were few questions:

- What is his or her approach towards the problems that exist within the society and what kind of resources do they use for accomplishing the tasks?
- Can this approach be applied globally, or rather can it be replicated in India?
- What are some of their beliefs about our profession? What are some of their ways to educate the professionals?

Below is a brief introduction about each individual's work.

### **Nihal Perera**

"In between and besides official plan-making, ordinary people produce more quantity and variety of spaces than the authorities and professionals. They both adapt to and adjust extant spaces for their daily activities and cultural practices, thus producing lived spaces out of abstract space."<sup>35</sup>

Nihal Perera is a multi faceted urbanist studying the ways in which and reasons why people 'negotiate' spaces. He considers this approach with students at Ball State University where he has worked as a faculty member in the Department of Planning since 1995. Perera has been working towards reforming the scope and definition of the traditional planning module in the United States. He believes that the urban planning field has to encompass the approach of a unidiscipline which implies that every field is a

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<sup>35</sup>Nihal Perera, "People's Spaces: Familiarization, Subject Formation and Emergent Spaces in Colombo," in *Planning Theory*, Volume 8 (2009): 51.

combination of numerous different fields that finally contribute towards a better and complete understanding of a particular field or subject. Perera asks these sets of questions “How do different people see their predicaments? How do they transform themselves to become subjects within assigned positions and given spaces? How do they negotiate accommodation for their own perceptions of subjectivity?”<sup>36</sup> As a responsible planner he insists that we need to acknowledge the fact that poor people have a matured sense of understanding about their needs and spaces. This is an outlook that Perera tries to imbibe into students who are interested in working towards understanding the less privileged people within the society.

Due to his inquisitive nature and the need to educate students outside the school curriculum, he created the CapAsia Field Study Program in 1999. The intention was to expose students from Western countries to Asian cultures, spaces and ways of life. The students’ classes include immersive studios that take a closer look at the problems of the communities where the students engage themselves as responsible individuals (and not just as planners or architects), and where they could generate humane solutions. Wes Janz joined him as co-director in 2000 and participated in 4 field studies. The experience during the CapAsia V, 2008 trip is summarized in the words of a participating student, Marino Solorio:

“Planners and other professionals, when working in many different contexts need to reevaluate their roles as professionals. In a sense it calls to question what that role is, but it is neither to belittle nor undermine the importance of that role. This process of interaction has appeased my affliction between formal education systems and informal, where I have learned to embrace formal education; yet to

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<sup>36</sup>Nihal Perera, “People’s Spaces: Familiarization, Subject Formation and Emergent Spaces in Colombo,” in *Planning Theory*, Volume 8 (2009): 51.

contest it and to derive conclusion that are not tainted with imposed biases. These and other biases will never cease to exist, but by being aware of them the possibility of arriving at an informed and balanced opinion may exist.”<sup>37</sup>

Another student, Dorothee Dettbarn, who participated in CapAsia III states,

“The confrontations and observations we made can serve as an introduction into the social and environmental responsibilities of planners. We should pay more attention to our environment and uncover hidden problems of our own society in order to enhance solutions. Problems won't be solved if nobody is aware of them. This field study was like a bombardment of building kinds, urban settings, planning attitudes, social and cultural customs, environmental views and approaches. It is like studying gets new motivations, directions and perspectives; one gets more out of it than if one would simply follow the direct way, the curriculum without reflecting on the studied content.”<sup>38</sup>

An awareness amongst the students through exposure will lead to creation of professionals that possess a matured sense of understanding towards the society. The students are now better equipped to deal with the needs of the people living in informal settlements. This field study develops a set of community development tools that can be used in various situations especially in developing countries. The study is immensely helpful to the students as it provides an opportunity for them to learn about the building culture and the building culture in turn reveals other social, religious, cultural aspects of the building process. Perera summarizes his philosophy as ‘education beyond school curriculum.’ As a progressive academic thinker, Perera believes that education is more important than mere training and that education always begins with practical real life experiences.

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<sup>37</sup>Marino Solorio, “Cap Asia,” <http://capasia.iweb.bsu.edu/index.html> (Accessed October 16,2009).

<sup>38</sup>Dorothee Dettbarn, “Cap Asia,” <http://capasia.iweb.bsu.edu/index.html> (Accessed October 16, 2009).

Inspite of being from two different (although related) fields, Perera and Janz work on dissolving these boundaries between their fields – architecture and planning.

Among the questions posed by the professors: Can we as architects or planners enhance the strengths that exist within a community? To address this issue, students act as facilitators and promoters of social interaction. This kind of approach is often difficult for the students since the profession trains the students to be 'problem solvers.' For the two academic activists this is more about learning from the people rather than acting for the people. Through every CapAsia visit they take the challenge of finding their own roles besides helping students find theirs in this changing world where the architecture and planning fields seem to be ignorant about these needs.

CapAsia is an attempt to define and educate the architects / planners for the future.

These interventions will be not only be helpful to the students who are a part of this trip but also to the other students and professionals as it will help them better understand their responsibility and role in developing the future urban form for any city.

### **Wes Janz**

“Now, I build small projects alongside architects, architecture students, artists, designers and the world's working and urban poor, believing I have much to learn from them and my knowledge regarding architecture and design might have relevance in their lives.”

Community activists, filmmakers, industrial designers, preservationists, writers, sculptors, photographers, architects, and many others are engaged as well, building more for others, wanting less for themselves.”

-----Wes Janz

Janz is also a multi-faceted activist / thinker who is studying squatter settlements within various parts of the world. As a researcher he is constantly teaching and learning about the informal settlements through his travels in Bangkok, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Chicago, Colombo, Delhi, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Los Angeles, Mumbai, New Orleans, St. Petersburg, and Singapore. Bryan Finoki who interviewed him for his blog Subtopia states,

“Part of what's so fascinating for me about a ‘squatter urbanism’ is the sheer ingenuity and human spirit that allows people to reclaim what might be deemed urban dead space - or, as Wes Janz sees it, “leftover space.”<sup>39</sup>

Janz has some understanding of the existence of problems within the lives of the poor. Part of his philosophy has been creating a sense of awareness amongst students about the poor through exposure to various readings, studios, case studies and study tours. A strong believer that ‘small change’ has tremendous potential, he maintains a website – ‘one small project’ that is a compilation of efforts in various countries towards the betterment of poor made by individuals who share values similar to his approach.

There are individuals who share his concern for better living conditions for all the people. The contributors include – Kurt West (Indianapolis), Anshu Sharma (India), Madura Prematilleke (Sri Lanka), Ana de Brea (Buenos Aires), and Kanikar Rattanapridakul (Thailand) to name a few. Janz believes that building knowledge and awareness about the surrounding environment is far more developed among local people than the architects who are self proclaimed experts. He believes that if a slum happens to possess a social, political and physical value (which it does) then by studying the

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<sup>39</sup>Wes Janz, *Wes Janz Interview*, Subtopia -<http://subtopia.blogspot.com/2006/03/wes-janz-interview.html> ( Accessed August 2009).

building culture we can better understand the significance of this entire system that exists within a city. Janz argues that professionals are often ignorant about the actual onsite realities and tend to be either biased or ignorant about the facts on ground. He promotes a shift in vantage point to understand the squatter residents and states, “Is a ‘slum’ a place of poverty and pain, as well as a place of vibrancy and life? What will the self-builder teach me, an architect? Am I the homeless one? Have I lost my way?”<sup>40</sup>

The problems that exist at the local level cannot be addressed unless and until an alternative ‘user-focused’ process that involves people in the design and decision making process is sought which can evolve through the attempts made by academic thinkers like Perera and Janz. There lies tremendous untapped potential in the role of the professionals which if explored can provide solutions to inequitable, inefficient planning for the poor. As a part of Janz’s studio ‘Towards Human and Humane Architectures,’ students worked on finding their role in the process of understanding and learning from the poor. He encouraged students to focus their attention on the unexplored potential that lies in what he calls the ‘leftover’ spaces. Janz mentions:

“In this context, the leftover is a potent category. Synonyms (consistent with a ‘consuming knowledge’ perspective) include waste and rubbish. Other synonyms, such as surviving and outstanding, turn the relationship on its head. Leftovers can be seen as something special, as having untapped potential.”<sup>41</sup>

Due to his need to explore unknown lives, in 2006 Janz and faculty colleague Olon Dotson organized ‘Midwest Distress Tour’ taking a dozen students to Detroit, Flint, Gary, Chicago, East St. Louis and Cincinnati. The students learned that the cities are

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<sup>40</sup>Wes Janz, *Wes Janz Interview*, Subtopia -<http://subtopia.blogspot.com/2006/03/wes-janz-interview.html> (Accessed August 2009).

<sup>41</sup>Wes Janz, *Towards Human and Humane Architectures*, Studio syllabus (Fall 2007).



significantly devastated since the economy (or rather the steel and automotive industries) is adversely affected. The group experienced situations which made them realize that our profession simply provides ‘fix it’ approaches which have their own limitations and we know little about the lives of working poor in America. Experiencing situations which expose the students to difficult living conditions is a way to make the young people understand their responsibility. Janz aptly summarizes his reflections about the entire journey as –

“Detroit, Flint, Gary, Chicago, East St. Louis, and Cincinnati are worlds where most if not everything we know as architects is wrong, or useless. Everything we know, all architectural knowledge, becomes secondary, or disproved, or of little or no use. From almost any perspective—sociological, economic, political, and architectural—these are abnormal places that are now normal. There are problems so deep, lives so destroyed, neighborhoods so defunct, buildings so deteriorated, that one comes to understand that nothing can be done. Nothing. And this is normal.”<sup>42</sup>



**Figure 36. Flint, Michigan and Gary, Indiana 2006, Photographs by Wes Janz**

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<sup>42</sup>Wes Janz, “Compared to What? Detroit, Flint, Gary, Chicago, East St. Louis, and Cincinnati, 2006 A.D.,” Archinect - [http://archinect.com/features/article.php?id=50579\\_0\\_23\\_0\\_C](http://archinect.com/features/article.php?id=50579_0_23_0_C)



**Figure 37. East St. Louis, IL, 2006,** Photographs by Wes Janz

The above photos very effectively trace the journey into some of the most depressing sites which reveal the stark reality about the communities within the cities. As an experienced teacher, Janz still feels that one of the greatest challenges is how to transfer real life experiences into design initiatives? How can we keep the ‘responsibility towards poor’ realization alive amongst students even after graduation? He expresses his concern in these words, “There is a kind of fall-away from what was learned about the disadvantaged or disenfranchised person and the existing material conditions of his, her, or their life, and a fall-back to known problems and solutions, to conventional thinking and ideas, to what was taught instead of what was learned.”<sup>43</sup>

**\*\*** As a professional, I believe this practice of taking students to the distressed areas is like an “eye opener” which should be implemented in the other parts of the world. A similar study can be created at *Architects for Empowerment* in Pune, India to study the various informal settlements within the city because the insights that students gain during such journeys are life changing as they realize the various social problems within the community.

<sup>43</sup>Wes Janz, “Compared to What? Detroit, Flint, Gary, Chicago, East St. Louis, and Cincinnati, 2006 A.D.,” Archinect - [http://archinect.com/features/article.php?id=50579\\_0\\_23\\_0\\_C](http://archinect.com/features/article.php?id=50579_0_23_0_C)

## Hector LaSala

“Resources can be anything – not just monetary, and a small project is a gesture that acts as a catalyst for change.”<sup>44</sup>-----Hector LaSala

LaSala is an activist and professor who inculcates a sense of social responsibility amongst many people including the architecture students at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette. Along with his colleagues, LaSala has established the Building Institute, an organization inspired by the Rural Studio. The people at the Building Institute study the ethical responsibilities of an architect, who they describe as being a ‘social critic,’ towards his or her society. One of their missions is to bridge the gap between architectural theory and practice. It is often the case that architectural school curriculum never matches with the practical real life architectural experience. So there is always a need to create a link amongst the two varied experiences so that the students do not get confused about their role in the real world. The Institute has designed a ‘hands on’ practical training and learning program that helps students understand the world beyond the school. As stated at their website:

“The Building Institute is founded upon the belief that the act of making meaningful architecture requires our students to take responsibility for their designs: cultural, social, political, fiscal and technical responsibilities, to name a few.”<sup>45</sup>

LaSala’s students work on studio projects that can make a difference in the lives of people in-need. Also the reason for the success of these design build projects is due to the firm belief that design and building flow together seamlessly. With colleagues, he

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<sup>44</sup>Hector LaSala, Quoted from a private conversation in Fall 2007.

<sup>45</sup>Hector LaSala, “The Building Institute” - <http://buildinginstitute.louisiana.edu/> (Accessed August 2009).

introduces students to design build studios that involve the disadvantaged individuals within the society. This gives the students an opportunity to practically deploy their construction technology skills while participating in uplifting the lives of poor individuals. LaSala is a man of an optimistic approach who believes that resources can be not only money but human power, materials and anything that can be used at the right time for the right purpose. He has the ability to think creatively and resourcefully in every situation. La Sala has tremendous energy and initiative which is contagious and worth admiring. He also believes in small change and wants to understand the needs of his communities than to impose solutions. Based on his experience LaSala claims that there are people out there ready to help you with your social work; the only thing you have to do is to make an attempt to reach out to them. The students have worked on projects like the Boy's and Girl's Club (Fall 2005), Acadiana Outreach Center (2003-Present) and Coussan House Restoration.

The Acadiana Outreach Center works with homeless and drug addicted people to provide them basic living facilities like food, shelter and clothing. One of the missions of Acadiana was to create a sense of identity amongst the people and help them live a respectable life. While working on the project the student group along with the professors designed a master plan that contained unifying architectural environments to include design installation, gazebo, seating and other landscaping and architectural elements. The group during their first visit realized that the environment was depressing and needed immediate attention. The students contributed their labor and skills to create a place that is highly appreciated by the homeless people inhabiting the space. This is the greatest success of the efforts since the users were able to relate and use the space in their desired way. The parasol and bench were the first structures to be installed. The



project was successful because the people felt a sense of belonging to the place creating a positive energy amongst them.



**Figure 38. Acadiana Outreach Center, 2008**

Photograph by Wes Janz

The parasol and the bench acts as a “relaxing spot” on the premises.



**Figure 39. Acadiana Outreach Center, 2008**

Photograph by Wes Janz

LaSala explains his students’ works.



**Figure 40. Acadiana Outreach Center, 2008**

Photograph by Wes Janz

The entry court is designed to evoke an optimistic response among the users.

Vicki Boudreaux, the Acadiana Outreach Center Systems Director, described the project in her words,

“We have witnessed students guiding clients and staff towards the beautification of a campus that was once desolate and uninviting. We have watched students build seating areas, gazebos, walkways and storefronts while simultaneously watching clients begin to take personal ownership for property that was previously typically ignored. We have also watched our own staff move towards an acceptance of encouraging and providing beauty as well as basic needs to our clients...something that occasionally seems contradictory in nature. It’s always wonderful to discover beauty and pride amidst growth and acceptance.”<sup>46</sup>

Such attempts from the academic world generate a tremendous positive energy amongst the students. However how many of LaSala’s students have been able to keep their feeling for social responsibility alive even after graduating from the school? Where and how would you confine the scope of the academic world? And then beyond the school who is actually ethically responsible for creating socially aware architects? The professional world comes into the picture at this point where the need is more serious to keep the passion alive amongst the students since earning money might not be the ultimate goal of an architect’s life.

### **Lebbeus Woods**

Woods is an artist and an architect who works towards promoting experimental architecture. He states, in his blog ‘Slums – one idea,’ the need for small incremental changes which then act as nutrients for building a healthy society. In his writings he compares the process of designing a house for the poor to the design of a capsule that

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<sup>46</sup>Hector LaSala, “The Building Institute” <http://buildinginstitute.louisiana.edu/introduction.shtml> (Accessed August 2009).

has the flexibility to adapt to the needs of the society. One benefit of these small changes is that people rapidly and easily adapt to these changes, and hence one should start with this process of rehabilitation of slums. Another of Wood's thoughts is that even though architects are used to designing in regular situations, when it comes to designing a house for poor people we are just beginners! He says "When it comes to the reformation of slums, we are a long way from having designs and are very much at the beginning of the having ideas stage."<sup>47</sup> Woods also states that as other vested interests start to manifest (political, economical, social), the process of rehabilitation slows down. So he probably is pointing in the same direction as Hamdi – change that is incremental and collectively organized; because no emergence is facilitated unless people realize and understand the power of collective organization. And in this process he states that,

"If we think of it (house) more like a nutrient, rather than a product, we understand that the results it creates are adapted in unique ways to particular persons or families, because it nurtures whatever is strong in a given situation, rather than imposing a uniform result based on a pre-conceived judgment of what is best."<sup>48</sup>

And I believe most of the times the problem is that we are prejudiced and biased when it comes to rehabilitation of poor and with our 'current mindset' we will never be able to connect and communicate with them. So 'How do we relate to the poor?' is a great challenge to us as individuals first, then as architects and professional planners.

Woods explains some of the challenges faced by informal settlers like lack of access to infrastructure facilities and questions that, "How can we design a nutrient pill that takes

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<sup>47</sup>Lebbeus Woods, "Slums: One idea" - <http://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2008/02/09/slums-oneidea/> (Accessed February 2008).

<sup>48</sup>Lebbeus Woods, Slums: One idea - <http://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2008/02/09/slums-one-idea/>

care of at least a few (if not all) weaknesses that exist within these environments?”<sup>49</sup>

What we need is a paradigm shift in the perceptions of the society which will come about once educated people start viewing the poor not as objects of poverty but as resources of architectural ideas. Woods effectively carries this idea through his analogy of a pill:

“if such a capsule could be designed by leading thinkers, engineers, architects; if it could be produced by the best technicians using advanced technological facilities; if it could be financed by institutions in the private and public sectors with vision of the vast benefits for everyone it would create; then it would seem that such a project could actually be accomplished.”<sup>50</sup>

So perhaps what we need is a change.

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<sup>49</sup> Lebbeus Woods, Slums: One idea -<http://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2008/02/09/slums-one-idea/>

<sup>50</sup> Lebbeus Woods, Slums: One idea -<http://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2008/02/09/slums-one-idea/>



## Are we well equipped as Professionals?

Architects and planners lack the knowledge and the skills to understand and comprehend the real world scenarios that involve the upgradation of the urban poor. So knowing when and how to intervene is a great challenge. What kind of professional skills, methods, tools and knowledge do we need to acquire? In spite of all these challenges every intervention might face criticism from users who are well aware of their needs and methods of practice. Hamdi describes this criticism: “What is so new about what professionals say about self help, self management, upgrading, incremental development, learning by doing, reflecting in action-which ordinary people, ordinary craftsman and small builders have been practicing for centuries, which they have known about all along.”<sup>51</sup> So there are a lot of challenges that need to be addressed in order to gain acceptance as a socially responsible profession.

## What Went Wrong?

“Investment in city wide infrastructure is a precondition for successful and affordable slums upgrading as lack of it is one strong mechanism by which the urban poor are excluded, and also by which improved slum housing remains affordable for them.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Nabeel Hamdi, “Deciding on Context,” in *Housing without houses: participation, flexibility, enablement* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), 9.

<sup>52</sup>United Nations Human Settlements Programme, “Assessing slums in the development context,” *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London & Sterling: Earth Scan, 2003), 28.

As a part of my visit to India in May 2008 I had the opportunity to meet Pratima Joshi, an architect / planner who has set up an NGO in my hometown that works towards the legalization of the slums within the city. The NGO - Shelter Associates - works in partnership with Baandhani, which is an organization of focussed slum dwellers who work to facilitate and support community housing and infrastructure projects. The NGO believes that poor people are the most appropriate individuals to find solutions to their own housing problems, and hence the two groups work together to empower poor communities to seek solutions for themselves. As part of this process, communities have collected information about their settlements and other slum settlements in Pune, and based on that information negotiations with authorities are begun which lead to the creation of slum rehabilitation projects.

One of the biggest shortfalls of the city's urban planning strategies is that it still fails to include the poor in mainstream policies. Joshi along with her supporters proposes the idea of an inclusive community in which the poor have rights equal to any other legal resident within the city. She has set up a database that includes information about the poor that can then be used by the authorities while framing policies for the future development of the city. Among the main messages of the Global Report on Human Settlements published by United Nations is the following: "Slum policies should seek to involve the poor in the formulation, financing and implementation of slum upgrading programs and projects, building on the logic of the innovative solutions developed by the poor themselves to improve their living conditions."<sup>53</sup> While forced eviction and resettlements still occur in India, the government is reluctant to change its repressive approach. In spite of these depressing conditions, there are innovative solutions

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<sup>53</sup>United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London & Sterling: Earth Scan, 2003), 27.

developed by poor people to improve their own living conditions. And according to the United Nations, there are immediate benefits to such an approach: “Where appropriate upgrading policies have been put in place, slums have become increasingly socially cohesive, offering opportunities for security of tenure, local economic development and improvement of incomes among the urban poor”<sup>54</sup>

In May 2008 I visited Suryodaya (Rising Sun), a housing project by Shelter Associates, located in Rajendra Nagar, Pune. In 1996, the city authorities demolished the slums that existed on the site; these were replaced with self built housing completed in 1998.



**Figure 41. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune**

May 2008

The project was completed on self help basis in which the dwellers contributed their labor for the project.

The women in the settlement along with Shelter Associates worked hard towards the process of negotiation with the city authorities. The houses were completed on the self help basis and during the planning process each and every individual had a right to

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<sup>54</sup>United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements 2003* (London & Sterling: Earth Scan, 2003), 25.

voice his or her opinion. The building is a three-storey structure, each house is 250 sqft with 1 toilet shared amongst 4 families. There is a central courtyard for gatherings.



**Figure 42. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune**  
May 2008  
The image shows shared toilets used by the residents.



**Figure 43. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune**  
May 2008  
The courtyard serves as a space for interaction.



**Figure 44. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune** May 2008  
The space is used by the residents to suit their needs.



**Figure 45. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune** May 2008

For the building process every household contributed one person per day for labor which helped save labor costs. This project was a great success for the NGO, but when I asked the residents about their experience they sounded upset. They were forced to work hard long hours and still they do not own the house 10 years after completion.

Each of these individuals paid a minimum amount to get access to their house which was turned over to them in an unfinished state.

So what went wrong in the process? Things got complex since the NGO never reached out to residents to follow up once the project was completed. The residents had to fix a lot of practical problems on their own, like unfinished flooring and an improper staircase.



**Figure 46. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune May 2008**

The residents explain their side of the story.



**Figure 47. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune**  
May 2008

The residents reacted strongly when asked about the overall experience of the project.

An architect was involved in the entire participatory process of designing the houses. However the model proposed was quite different from the one they received. The NGO has been working on solving the various problems like sanitation, provision of infrastructure facilities, and preparing a census of slum inhabitants which is very much needed in this current situation. The NGO claims that they have been responsive and understanding towards the problems of the communities. But still there is a mismatch as far as the coordination and communication amongst the people and the NGO authorities.





**Figure 48. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune May 2008**

The mezzanine floor does not have enough overhead clearance and was provided in an unfinished state.



**Figure 49. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune May 2008**

The rooms are being used for varied functions as per the family's needs.

The NGO is dedicated towards improving the lives of the people. However can the people's experience about this entire process be ignored? There is something lacking in this entire process of community development that cannot be overlooked.



**Figure 50. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune May 2008**

The houses were handed over to the people in an unfinished state. The residents had to arrange for flooring and painting which is unaffordable for the residents.

It was apparent that the people had to face practical problems when adjusting to the designs and the entire construction quality. Are the non-governmental organizations not paying attention to the dweller's needs or is it just 'we know what is right for the people' thinking? Why does this difference of opinion exist between Shelter Associates and the residents?



**Figure 51. Suryodaya Housing Society, Pune**  
May 2008

The metal staircase has been replaced by the residents since the initial staircase provided was not very safe and had no railing.



Such insights made me think about the actual process of participatory design. Ideally the process promotes interaction and co-ordination amongst the people. But when asked about the flaws of the architectural design, the residents claimed that the design they had approved was different from the one that was built. It became evident to me that there is a need to provide a 'voice' for the people suffering in such situations within the city.

Although Joshi has been fighting to provide the poor their legitimate status, the residents of Suryodaya do not yet own their houses after 10 years of completion. She has set up a network of women at the local level who deal with the women in Suryodaya. Joshi is disconnected with the people she is working for because none of the residents are in touch with her after the completion of the project. Apparently there is an urgent need for the residents to express their concerns and opinions about the project and the results. Shelter Associates is dedicated towards the work of upgrading lives of informal settlers but is a 'top down' approach still present? Does the NGO determine what is best for the people? The challenge about implementation of 'bottom up' approach still persists since the opinion of people goes unnoticed.

### **Robert Neuwirth**

Robert Neuwirth is a journalist and a writer interested in slums in developing countries. He stayed for about 6 months each in 4 various slums to understand the specific lives and general characteristics of the settlements. According to Neuwirth, there is a range of positive features that often go unnoticed. Slum dwellers are hard working entrepreneurs, talented as any other business owner in the formal economy. Neuwirth has a very

positive outlook towards slums and slum dwellers. He believes that slums are a major part of the world community and this is something most of the world wants to ignore or deny. As a visitor he studies the mind set and psychology of the slum dwellers, which made him realize that each one has his or her own various reasons to come to the city. In the meantime newcomers settle into the urban structure after gaining a means of living along with a sense of security. In his book *Shadow Cities* Neuwirth describes the local economy, class structures, urban form, architecture, phases of development, and various attempts to legalize the squatter settlements in Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai, Nairobi and Istanbul which helped him trace the similarities in the various localities. He states that there is lack of political will and a holistic approach on the professional's side which prevents upgrading of slums. Neuwirth is a firm believer that the only most crucial element that would contribute towards an inclusive city is the provision of land ownership to the poor people which can then elevate their physical existence. Not in favor of the attempts of rehabilitation that leads to creation of unaffordable housing; Neuwirth instead insists that in-situ or on-site upgradation is more feasible and acceptable from the user's point of view.

I agree with his views since I have seen the problems in such situations. The informal settlers near Kamgar Putala, Pune would have faced fewer problems if the authorities had proposed rehabilitation on a nearby piece of land. The current location is far away from their place where they have strong business and social connections.

Neuwirth does convey the lifestyle of poor settlers in the developing world through his research in *Shadow Cities* and his blog Squatter Cities. In his article titled 'Lagos Go Slow' he discusses the rapid rate of urbanization in Lagos and how the residents are

transforming the metropolis into a hub of economic and social activities. He describes how the creation of an infrastructure facility like a simple bridge can create tremendous opportunities for social, economic, and also criminal activities. The reasons behind that ignorance can be numerous and subjective so we perhaps need to revisit our opinions and shed at least some of the negative perceptions about these places. In his own words Neuwirth says “Lagos has a lot to teach us about the future of cities and the evolution of their structures.”<sup>55</sup> The tremendous amount of activity and life that exists in these organically built-up spaces is not to be found in the well planned and designed urban spaces; even though the designed spaces possess a sense of character and space they lack the enticing and alluring factor in these lively environments where need is the prime driving force. As Neuwirth describes it – the demand for economic activities takes over everything. The most unfortunate part is that even though we know that the urbanization rate is increasing and most of the second tier cities are not equipped to handle these increments, not enough attempts have been initiated.



**Figure 52. Dharavi, Mumbai 2008**  
Photograph by Wes Janz  
The local entrepreneurs at Dharavi sell mud pots.



**Figure 53. Dharavi, Mumbai 2008**  
Photograph by Wes Janz  
The local entrepreneurs at Dharavi sell vegetables.

<sup>55</sup>Robert Neuwirth, “Lagos Go Slow,” *Azure*, (2007): 155.

Neuwirth proposes that we have much to learn from the residents about their way of life. The most significant things that are missing in their life is the access to resources and land ownership. If provided with these, the people can develop into a self sufficient community. If basic infrastructure facilities have the potential to bring about such a massive change then what is keeping us from implementing such programs?

### **Nabeel Hamdi**

Hamdi is an activist who tries to explore the meaning of 'development' as it impacts human societies. He restates Turner's approach:

“When dwellers control the major decision and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well being. When people have no control over; nor responsibility for; the key decisions the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfillment and a burden on the economy.”<sup>56</sup>

Hamdi believes in bottom-up self-organizing collectivism rather than formal top- down approaches, and practices. He states that his preferred process of developing poor communities is a form of enablement. By this he means an ongoing process in which, occasionally and from outside, some form of intervention is useful to open up opportunities, to facilitate access to resources, and to act as a catalyst for change.

Hamdi argues that in order to understand the process of development there needs to be a change in the perspective or focus if the viewer belongs to a rich class of society, as he may not necessarily see the component parts. Through his books (*Small Change, Housing without Houses*) Hamdi sets out the community based system and the

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<sup>56</sup>John F.C. Turner, *Freedom to build: dweller control of the housing process* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 7.

complementary roles of architects in a sustainable society. He derives his resources for community building based on 'people power' manifested mainly through local initiatives. Also he claims that the building knowledge of the dwellers is different and complementary to that of the professionals and the authorities.

Based on experience, he sets out a structured framework to implement the process of community improvement and upgradation. (I prefer using upgradation since we as professionals have a lot to learn from these vernacular builders.) The role of the architects or the planners is to facilitate the process of designing and not intervene as a designer who most of the times provides a 'fix it' approach. So to understand the local's situation, an architect or a planner has to have an association or involvement in the lives of the poor. In his book *Small Change*, Hamdi searches for a definition of the role of a visiting professional outsider (which I believe I am trying to understand as a part of my research) and also states that to build a community one has to get organized and react collectively facilitating 'emergence' – "Skilful practitioners understand the interdependence between design and emergence. They know that in today's turbulent environment the challenge is to find the right balance between creativity of emergence and stability of design."<sup>57</sup> So, according to Hamdi, to make something big – one has to start with something small and start where it is needed, which I believe was the most valuable insight as an architect who aspires to work in a developing country.

Some of the similarities that he shares with LaSala and Janz are based on the beliefs that they share – small beginnings have emergent potentials. Howard Davis explains that each informal settlement builds on a certain building culture. Hamdi goes further,

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<sup>57</sup>Nabeel Hamdi, *Small Change* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 15.

stating that based on these existing patterns all new developments can be adaptively designed to belong to these communities. One more striking thought is that an architect is more of an improviser - one who reflects, learns from experiences and adapts according to the hurdles that come along. In these communities the problem of ignorance from the professional's side often persists. I believe it is time that the profession expands its scope to include (and not exclude) the needs of informal settlers. Hamdi lays out a framework for implementing rehabilitation strategies in the developing world and promotes community based projects based on community involvement. While doing so he explains the complementary roles of architects in a sustainable society. Hamdi states that community initiatives are manifestations of people's power and that most of the times the standardized imposed solutions to housing problems cannot match the variety of personal and local demands. He also blames the authorities and professionals for not understanding the needs of the poor. As an active community planner Hamdi states three alternatives for the implementation process – working directly for and with residents; working for and with the supralocal authorities or suppliers who control access to resources on which local initiative depends; and acting as an intermediary in negotiations between local and central organizations.<sup>58</sup> Among the lessons I take from Nabeel Hamdi are the following: An architect must be associated with a community in order to understand their difficulties. However, how much intervention is needed in any situation? Can any experienced architect act as a catalyst in the process of improvisation? Hamdi lays down tools of community development based on his experience, but not all tools work in every situation. For example, the existing conditions in Pune settlements will be different than the ones which are described in his books. So there are challenges related to implementation which cannot

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<sup>58</sup>Nabeel Hamdi, *Housing without houses: participation, flexibility, enablement* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), 10.

be predicted in advance but can only be dealt based on experience. Hamdi's philosophy is more of an approach that needs to be adopted and practiced for successful implementation.

\*\* In Pune, the architectural students will be encouraged to participate as a visiting outside professional who works with the people and for the people.

## Exploring Various Forms of Empowerment

As an attempt to understand the efforts being made by institutions to improve the living conditions of the poor, I studied two NGOs in India and two non profit agencies located in Indianapolis, Indiana. Both provide a background with which to frame approaches for the proposal that follows.

These four precedent studies consider attempts made by resourceful people who are trying to change the world into a better place. However, each of these endeavors has potential to alter the problems faced by society. If there are increased efforts of a similar manner, the world will be closer to being a place where every individual has better access to resources despite being from an economically disadvantaged society.

My May 2008 visit to a Pune slum settlement made me realize that there was need to search for various ways to promote the independence of the people. As a part of my study, I visited **Second Helpings**, in Indianapolis, Indiana. This is a group of inspired people who creatively use excessive food to feed the poor in the community. The tremendous positive energy was so contagious that I felt a part of the group. There were local people who volunteered and came in regularly on weekdays and weekends. The organization works towards empowering the poor by feeding them with nutritious meals. The non profit was set up by a group of chefs who sought alternative ways to reduce the food waste in the industry. They are socially responsible individuals who are well aware of the plight of the poor and their lack of access to the education. So they decided to



contribute their share by setting up Second Helpings in 1998. The entire concept is very well summarized on the website –

“So the three chefs set forth to solve all four problems--food waste, hunger, job training, and a source of skilled labor for the local food service industry--with one solution: turn unused food into meals and jobs.”<sup>59</sup>

Second Helpings acquires food that is prepared and perishable, which is then made into nutritious meals which are then supplied to about 50 social service organizations. The donors can be anyone from restaurant owners, distributors, and caterers to individual households who realize and recognize their social responsibility. Also some of the food is used to train students with the basic culinary skills. Second Helpings currently turns over 100,000 pounds of rescued food into 50,000 meals every month.<sup>60</sup> There are about 400 volunteers who help prepare meals.



**Figure 54. Second Helpings, Indianapolis**  
Oct 2009  
The kitchen hosts a number of volunteers who enjoy serving their community.



**Figure 55. Second Helpings, Indianapolis**  
Oct 2009  
Every volunteer has to follow certain instructions which help maintain the cleanliness and hygiene such as wearing an apron, plastic gloves, and a cap or hairnet.

<sup>59</sup>Second Helpings, <http://www.seconddhelpings.org/about/default.asp> (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>60</sup>Second Helpings, <http://www.seconddhelpings.org/about/default.asp> (Accessed July 2009).



**Figure 56. Second Helpings, Indianapolis**  
Oct 2009

The preparation of meals was an enjoyable activity.



**Figure 57. Second Helpings, Indianapolis**  
Oct 2009

The kitchen has a number of volunteers who enjoy serving their community.

The food is collected through refrigerated trucks and vans. Food collected consists of bread, produce, and meat, all of which are diverted from landfill. The staff is trained in safety and hygiene, and collect only the food that they determine to be edible and safe. Second Helpings has a staff of 12 employees and 400 volunteers. The Hunger Relief Kitchen is like a community kitchen designed to accommodate their special needs. The area requirements are a large space for storage, washing, and meal preparation. Perishable items like meats, breads are refrigerated and seasonal vegetables are preserved for use throughout the year. Volunteers can help as kitchen assistants, drivers, office assistants and job skills trainers as per their interests and experience.

**\*\* Similarly an efficient network of volunteers, donors and receiving agencies can be adopted for *Architects for Empowerment* which is an NGO in Pune that I am proposing later in the chapter titled 'Proposal for an NGO.'**

The second case study is related to micro-credit, a concept first implemented by Mr. Mohammed Yunus, an economist from Bangladesh who has won a Nobel Prize (2006) for his efforts. According to Dr. Yunus one way to eliminate poverty is by lending small amounts to the poor which they can eventually pay back over a period of time. This loan can then help improve lives by providing opportunities to set up businesses, access to education and similar resources. Small material investments act as tools of empowerment leading to a creation of a more viable society. Mr. Yunus is known as the 'Banker to the Poor' since he has adopted the micro lending approach through his own Grameen Bank, established on the principles of holistic growth of economically disadvantaged people. The majority of the borrowers are women who are highly trusted due to the reasons that they support, shape and nurture the future of a family. Grameen Bank empowers women by making them independent individuals. The Bank works towards uplifting the status of poor women by allowing them to own assets. There are a number of reasons for the success of the approach:

1. The borrowers are given loans without collateral by assessing their potential and not their material assets.
2. The repayment is in form of small installments that are spread out over a longer period.
3. The borrowers are encouraged to adopt educational, social and health related goals like education for children, no dowry, and planting trees.

With the explosive growth of our economically disadvantaged population worldwide, access to resources remains an equally tough challenge that can only be overcome if the individuals who have access to resources help the ones who do not have them. In a society where the number of slums is growing there is a tremendous need for small investments which have the potential of bringing about positive outcomes in the society.

**MicroPlace** is a socially responsible company that works to provide a better future for the less privileged around the world. So an individual who has a concern for the well being of the economically weak people within the society can help by donating a certain amount of money. The company, which is owned by eBay, wants to mitigate the amount of poverty (perhaps to acquire recognition in the market) in the entire world. Any individual can donate a minimum amount of \$20 which acts as an investment fund for the financial institutions in developing countries who provide loans to the poor. And in return the financial institutions provide an interest for the amount that an individual invests. This process allows for the flow or rather distribution of economic resources to those who need it the most. Similarly if there is a need for an equitable distribution of resources then this would lead to the creation of a more sustainable / viable society that can understand the needs of the less privileged. On their website MicroPlace defines their mission as: "Empowering people to help themselves is an effective way to fight poverty."<sup>61</sup> Furthermore the company describes the concept of social investment: "When you give to charity you give your money away. When you invest your money, it compounds while it is invested and is available to reinvest at maturity."<sup>62</sup> The procedure for investment is simple – Open an investment account and then donate your money and in return receive your entire money back with interest at maturity. However the point where a clear difference exists between Grameen Bank and MicroPlace is the approach towards the borrowers. Grameen Bank believes each individual should have a right for equal access to resources and hence minimum interest

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<sup>61</sup>MicroPlace [https://www.microplace.com/learn\\_more/howitworks](https://www.microplace.com/learn_more/howitworks) (Accessed July 2009).

<sup>62</sup>MicroPlace [https://www.microplace.com/learn\\_more/howitworks](https://www.microplace.com/learn_more/howitworks) (Accessed July 2009).

is charged which can never exceed the total loan amount. However MicroPlace charges high interest rates by treating this process of lending as a business.

The next case study is an organization of a dedicated group in Mumbai. Known as '**Hamara Footpath**,' these local citizens accept poor individuals and empower them through education. These children are homeless individuals who are working as part of the local economy to earn money for livelihood. The kids are so engrossed into their work that they seem to lose their sense of being a child who also has the right to enjoy the basic needs of childhood such as the right to express themselves through art and playing, enjoying and spending time with their friends.



**Figure 58. Hamara Footpath**  
Source-  
<http://www.hamarafootpath.org>



**Figure 59. Hamara Footpath**  
Source- <http://www.hamarafootpath.org>

The group meets every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday at the footpath (sidewalk) near a jewelery store in Mumbai. The street kids are encouraged to paint, tell stories, dance, and perform activities that delight them in any way. The group offers an opportunity to volunteer for anyone who is genuinely interested. The volunteers introduce themselves to the kids and begin to develop a bonding with the kids. Through this entire journey the volunteers get to learn a lot about the lives and relationships amongst the poor. The group has a lot of resourceful individuals who are interested in

their efforts; so these people help with fund raising, innovative ideas, creating awareness, organizing trips and help seize every creative opportunity to better the lives of the individuals. In doing so they themselves are touched by the tender feelings of love and attachment that the kids exhibit towards them. The mission of Hamara Footpath can be described as an attempt to restore or protect the childhood of the homeless kids staying on the footpath by nurturing their creative talents.



**Figure 60. Hamara Footpath**  
Source- <http://www.hamarafootpath.org>



**Figure 61. Hamara Footpath**  
Source- <http://www.hamarafootpath.org>

The most striking aspect of the group is the acceptance of the poor children and relating to them as individuals. Acceptance of the poor is the first step towards legalizing their existence. This strategy provides a vent for the psychological problems in the kids' minds and allows for their creative energies to flow. A piece of art thus created by a child has a special value that can never be evaluated in terms of money. This might seem like a small act but it has the potential to bring about a major change in the lives of the kids. This activity acts as a platform of expression for the kids who then start this explorative journey into their creative minds.



The last study is a unique attempt by a group of people in Indianapolis to empower the children in the community. **School on Wheels** is a group of 19 employees and 360 volunteers who provide tutoring to homeless children. Sally Bindley felt the need to educate school-aged homeless kids in 2000 so she started tutoring on the street. School on Wheels was initiated in 2001 and since then they have made a huge difference amongst the homeless children in the city. The mission of the group is to enhance and enrich educational opportunities for school-aged children.<sup>63</sup> They implement the mission through two initiatives – ‘Tutors in Action’ and ‘Ignite Learning.’ So far the group has educated nearly 2,900 kids, trained over 1,200 community volunteers, and distributed nearly 1,100 backpacks and 4,353 clothing items for homeless kids.<sup>64</sup> The tutors are more like mentors who provide the necessary guidance. They inspire creative learning amongst the kids who share an intimate relationship with their tutors. The organization helps parents of homeless children to better equip themselves to support the educational needs of their children.



**Figure 62. Schools on Wheels**

Source-  
<http://www.indyschoolonwheels.org/>



**Figure 63. Schools on Wheels**

Source-  
<http://www.indyschoolonwheels.org/>

<sup>63</sup>Indy School on Wheels, <http://www.indyschoolonwheels.org/dspStats.html> (Accessed Oct 20, 2009).

<sup>64</sup>Indy School on Wheels, <http://www.indyschoolonwheels.org/dspStats.html> (Accessed Oct 20, 2009).

This is a way of shedding ignorance and empowering the kids through knowledge. If they are educated they can take charge of their own lives and that would also reduce the crimes and illiteracy rate within the country. This would eventually help to change the belief that the poor are always criminals. Each and every individual can help in their own little ways by volunteering (as tutor) or donating a certain amount of money towards the activity. There is a network of about 10 partnering agencies who provide economical assistance to the group.

### **Lessons Learned**

Each of the precedent studies is inspiring, unique, and resourceful. Empowerment follows after a sense of awareness is instilled into the community. So as the country faces the challenges of globalization there arises a need to understand, comprehend and recognize that slums are and in the future will be an enormous, inseparable part of the urban world and society. So therein lies a responsibility with the architecture and planning profession to include an informal settlement resident while proposing comprehensive physical plans for the city. Such inclusion will provide the people access to various means of knowledge that would lead to the creation of a community.

These case studies reveal that resources always exist if thought of creatively. There is a need for creative people who can better understand these resources and put them to use appropriately. One of the most urgent and crucial needs in a developing country is to educate the people, to provide them an opportunity to express their opinion, and to fight for the rights of the impoverished. This can be attained if the people are provided with avenues for enablement. In Pune the people in informal settlements are in need of



similar approaches that would help them gain access to resources. Every case study is unique because it has evolved out of intense need or rather every attempt is need based. In Indianapolis approximately 1,500 kids are homeless each year.<sup>65</sup> So using education as a way to encourage progress amongst homeless kids contributes towards reduction of poverty and crime. Slum literacy is still a huge problem in Pune, even though the literacy rate is greater than 50%. Hence there is a huge requirement for tutoring for adult as well as kids. Also Schools on Wheels has a site coordinator who works towards managing the volunteers, parents and ensures there is conducive environment for training. Poverty and lack of access to resources are inter-related so Second Helpings has very creatively dealt with the problem of hunger and joblessness. In the process they have minimized food waste and provided the necessary job skills to the people. Schools on Wheels and Second Helpings have set up a well knit network of partnering agencies.

*\*\*At Architects for Empowerment, Pune there will be a site coordinator (similar to School on Wheels) appointed to promote encouraging environment. Also the volunteers will visit the slum pockets in the city once a week for tutoring. The approach of networking (at Second Helpings) can be adopted at Architects for Empowerment in Pune which can help in providing meals to people. The concept of microloans to the needy will be adopted in Pune but on an incremental basis. The loan amount would be confined during the initial period due to limited funds but will be increased gradually as the donation amounts rise. Also an initiative like Hamara Footpath which requires minimal financial investment can be adopted in Pune. The city has large number of artists who will be invited as visiting professionals to teach the kids.*

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<sup>65</sup>Indy School on Wheels, <http://www.indyschoolonwheels.org/dspStats.html> (Accessed Oct 20, 2009).

## ARCHITECTS FOR EMPOWERMENT

### Proposal for a Non Governmental Organization

#### **Need for an NGO:**

In Pune, the majority of informal settlers contribute to the formal local economy. If they are provided with services like education and food they will be able to upgrade their lifestyle. After studying the precedent studies there was a realization that there are tremendous numbers of creative opportunities that are never thought about when thinking about these local people. There are a lot of unexplored avenues which if implemented could create a more sustainable society that understands the importance of the local working poor. Shantabai's children, if provided with food and education, could support themselves along with the family. The old lady in the house could be taught to read and write so that she can understand the world better. There are a large number of restaurants in the city who can contribute a one-time meal for an informal settler.

Based on the studies, I propose to set up a Non Governmental Organization that will provide a form of enablement amongst the informal dwellers. The organization would function as a public or charitable trust registered under the Bombay Public Trusts Act of 1950. The basic underlying belief for the non governmental organization would be - Enablement can be achieved if and only if the planners and architects work along with the informal residents and understand (rather learn from) them and in the process help them improve the quality of life in terms of accessibility to resources and better infrastructure facilities.

**Name: Architects for Empowerment****Mission:**

Empowerment of local working poor in Pune through access to education and food.

**Location:** The Organization will be located in Shree Geeta Society, Shivadarshan, Pune.

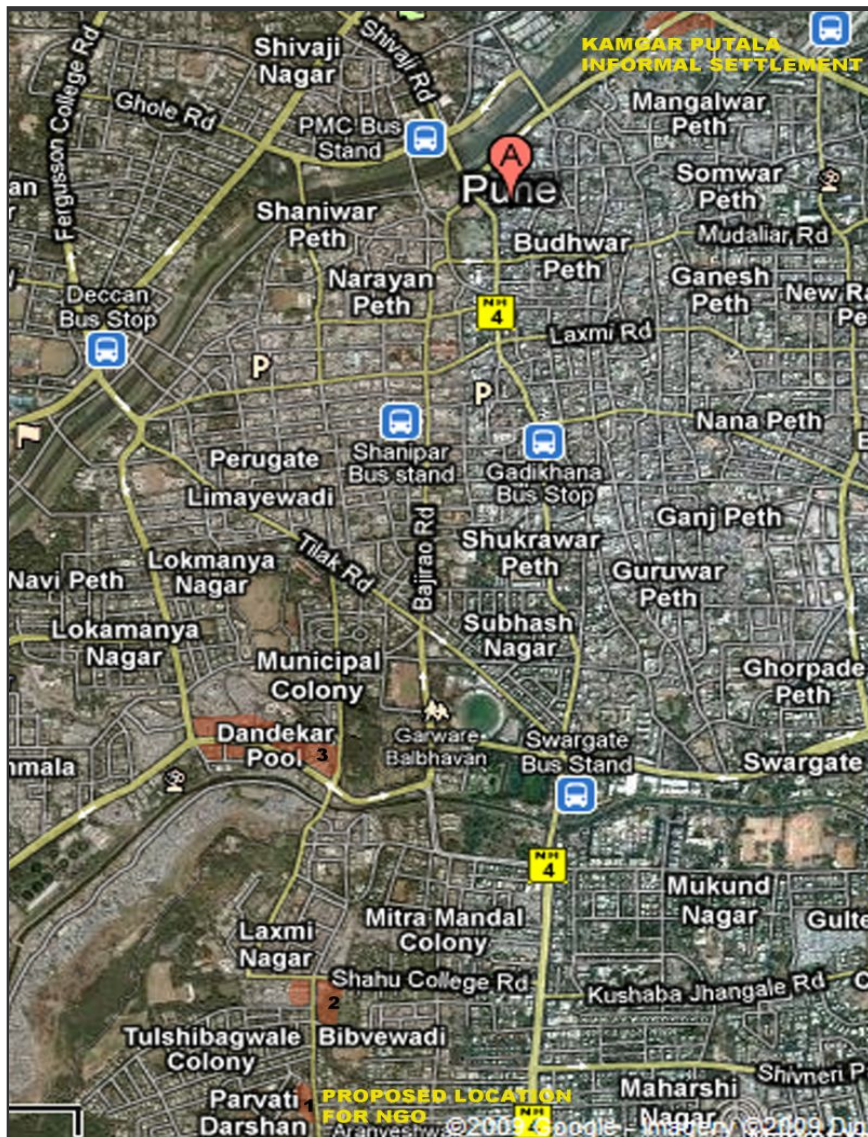
**Vision:**

The various activities that will be performed by the NGO can be summarized as –

1. Offer micro-credit loans to working poor.
2. Providing a creative space to engage the kids in various arts that would help them evolve as responsible individuals.
3. Conducting basic adult and child literacy classes for the ones who cannot afford to attend school.
4. Providing one-time meal to kids of the working poor.
5. Creating 'Internet Literate' individuals in the working community.

**Background Study:**

Slum pockets are dispersed throughout the entire city. The distance between the Kamgar Putala Settlement and the proposed location of Architects for Empowerment is approximately 5 kilometers. The area is well connected through a bus network so travel between the places would be convenient.



**Figure 64. Slum Pockets, Pune, India**

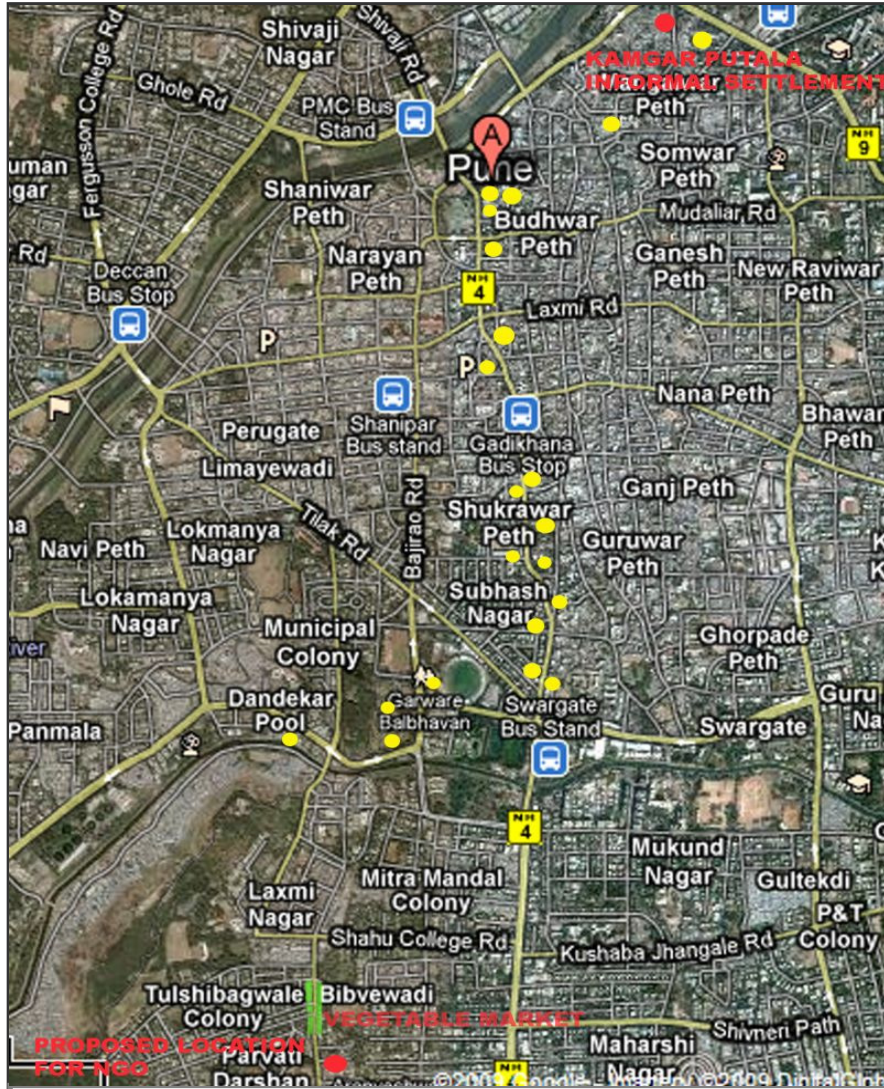
The map shows the various slum pockets located within proximity to Architects for Empowerment. The numbers and red spots represent slum areas.

Source-Google Maps

There are 20 restaurants in the area that could provide food items to the organization.

The map below shows the location of various restaurants. Also there is a large vegetable market in Shivadarshan Square which can donate vegetables.



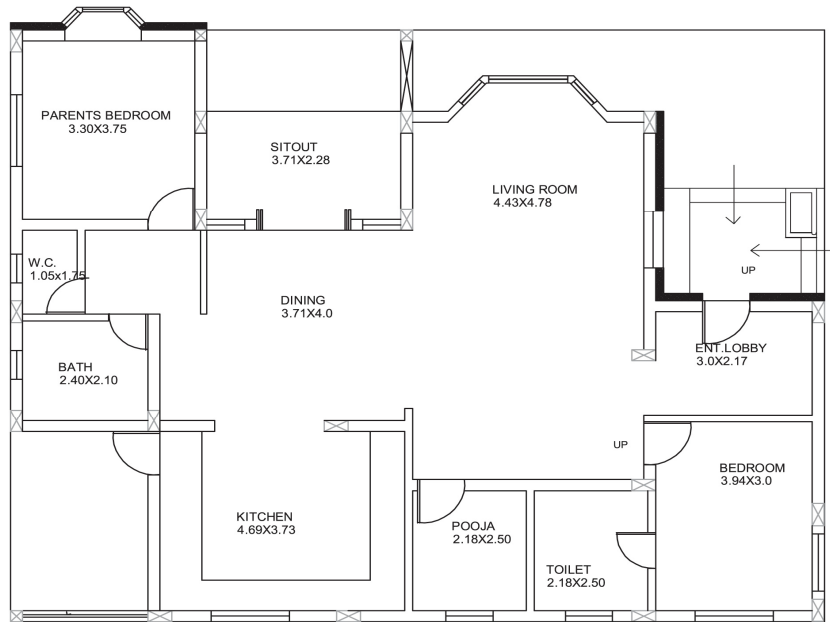


**Figure 65. Restaurants Near Shivadarshan Square, Pune**

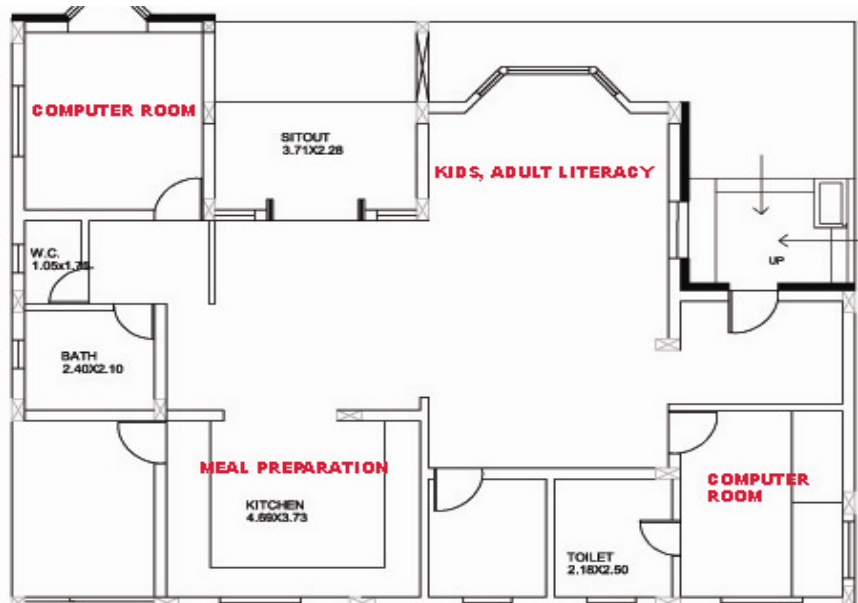
The yellow dots represent various restaurants and caterers near Architects for Empowerment.

Source: Google Maps

The existing plan shown below could be customized to be used as a place for Architects for Empowerment. The area is approximately 1000 square feet.



**Figure 66. Apartment Plan, Shree Geeta Society, Shivadarshan,**



**Figure 67. Apartment Plan, Shree Geeta Society, Shivadarshan, Pune**

Staff:

The staff would include 5 employees, who would maintain the apartment, coordinate activities within the apartment, transport the food to informal settlements and prepare meals for the kids. Volunteers can sign up to assist with activities like tutoring the kids, adults and teaching computer literacy courses. The management operations such as signing up volunteers, fiscal decisions, marketing, fund raising and networking would be handled by the author. The methodology for implementation of goals is explained in detail below:

**Micro-credit loans to working poor:**

There are a number of non-resident Indians from the city scattered around the world who are willing to donate money to the city's poor. The NGO will set up its own website to invite people to donate. In the initial period, funds will be raised by collecting money from each person within my network. The group consists of individuals from Pune city and currently residing in the United States. The group is currently donating money to Radhabai Hardikar Pranijat Mangal Sanstha, Pune which provides free schooling to girls in poor families. At the beginning total loans of up to 45,000 rupees (1000 dollars) shall be provided to the people. The process of lending will be based on the principles of Grameen Bank. Accordingly, the loans will be given only to responsible working women who support their families. The decision about lending money will be made on following conditions:

1. The family should be earning enough money to provide meals each day.
2. At least one member in the family should be able to read and write.
3. The borrower should provide evidence that she is able to save a minimum amount of 5,000 rupees (100 dollars) in an annual savings account.

4. The loan amount per person would vary between 2,500 rupees (25 dollars) – 10,000 rupees (200 dollars) depending on the savings in their account.
5. The interest rate will be minimal and the total interest amount will never exceed the loan amount.

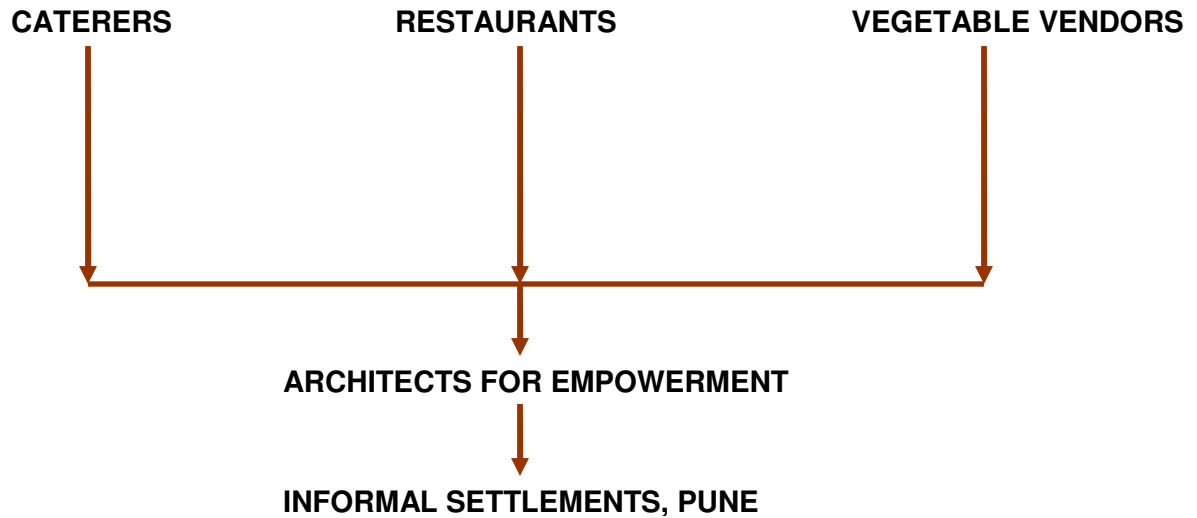
**Providing a creative space to engage the kids in various arts:**

The volunteers can sign up for teaching the kids various art forms as per their convenience and availability. The adult literacy classes would be conducted once or twice a week depending on number of students.

**Providing meals to the kids within the poor community:**

This would serve a dual purpose - minimizing the waste of food and encouraging the kids to attend the evening classes at the center. The employees would prepare meals in the morning which will then transported to various slum pockets. Due to limited funds the number of meals would be limited. There are about 20 restaurants in the area who might be willing to contribute their food. The food would consist of flour, vegetables and rice. The rice and flour can be collected and stored in the apartment in advance. However perishable items like vegetables will be collected and refrigerated for up to a week.





#### **Creating Internet Literate individuals:**

The NGO will purchase 3 computers that will provide internet access to informal settlers.

The architectural students from colleges in Pune would be encouraged to teach the people basic computer operations and internet applications. Volunteers would be necessary for accomplishing the task. The course will create self awareness amongst the learners who will develop better job skills. The adults and kids in the community will be taught basic computer skills which would allow them to connect to the global world. The residents will be able to express their concerns, aspirations, needs, and desires on the blog below –

<http://architectsforempowerment.blogspot.com/>

The internet literacy would provide the people better job prospects besides access to the world of knowledge on the internet. There is strong need for the networking for the successful implementation of the plan. Although the scope of the organization is confined the volunteers can belong to any profession, social or economic structure. Their desire to understand and serve the needs of the less fortunate will be the driving force

and the source of empowerment for the people. The various individuals will bring their own unique set of assets in terms of various resources (like skill sets), and knowledge which would contribute towards the goal fulfillment. This strategy will empower the poor through awareness about their rights and needs.

The NGO will accomplish its goals by training architectural students, professional architects, businesspeople, and anyone who feels the need to serve the society. Also as a socially aware individual and a professional I will propose to the Pune University authorities a course to understand and study the poor settlements within the city that could be included into the architectural curriculum. The syllabus will include readings about squatter settlements, and readings by Robert Neuwirth (Shadow Cities), Howard Davis (Culture of Building) and Mike Davis. As a part of this course the students will engage themselves into the local building culture of the poor and then help them build infrastructure facilities. Studio will be mostly based on interaction with local people in various slum pockets in city. The group will study and highlight the assets of the squatter settlements and later on pass their knowledge to the rest of the society. The students will be going on a formal trip to visit the slums in the city. Field based studios will be organized where the people will interact with the students and discuss their problems. A design build studio will also be included as a part of which the students would work in groups on a small scale projects in collaboration with the dwellers to contribute their skills and labor.

### Summary of Financial Investments:

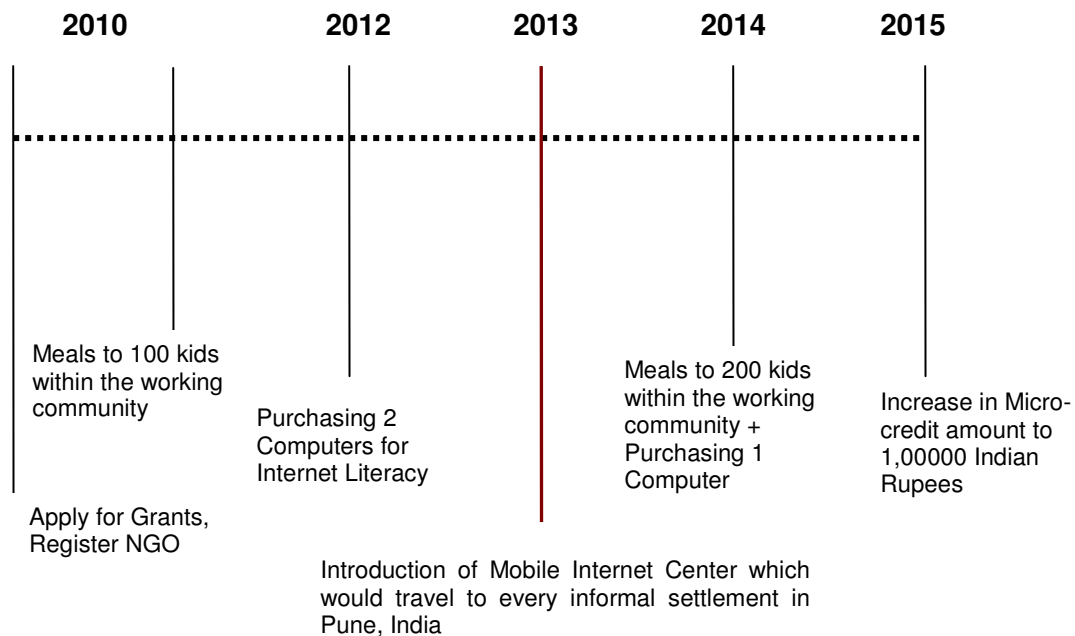
Employee Allowance (annual basis) – 100,000 Indian Rupees (2,000 US Dollars)

Computers (Fixed Cost) – 50,000 (1,000 US Dollars)

Micro Credit Loans – 50,000 (1,000 US Dollars)

An incremental approach will be adopted for implementation of the vision.

### Timeline



### Towards a New Beginning

Setting up Architects for Empowerment in Pune is the first step towards recognition of the people in an informal settlement and their contribution to the larger society. The attempts for empowerment need to be put into practice more often and in large numbers so that the concept of “inclusive city” can be successfully realized where in the poor and the rich co-exist in co-operation. There is a need for more and more architects to realize

their social responsibility and work to provide better living conditions to the poor. An architect's goal for the future can be stated as - Getting organized and setting development goals since it is the basis of good governance and sustainable work as it empowers people and provides new opportunities.

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